

The hearth down under

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The hearth down under

by [Crystalquill](#)

Summary

Tommy decides that Dream is a dickhead, and he doesn't listen to dickheads. So what if Dream said it's not his time to die? If Tommy wants to jump into the fucking lava, he'll jump into the fucking lava. Being saved by some stranger was NOT part of the plan!

Far, far away, a creature made of stolen divinity and hunger decides to play a game of gods.

Notes

This idea came to me like that one vine of the stomp rocket: it was like “oh damn! There comes another story idea... AUGH! *gets hit in the face, the camera falls to the floor*” Basically, this is just self-indulgent hurt/comfort brain rot that I *have* to get out of my system if I want to be a functioning human being again, but if I'm writing this might as well share it.

I've read a lot of DSMP fics so if you find something similar, it's probably me unconsciously taking inspiration. That said, I've specifically taken inspiration from the fic Rewind, mostly around the worldbuilding of the piglin tribes and a few other tiny details. I *adore* that fic. So yeah. Welcome to the show.

Chapter 1

Tommy watches with dread as the last photos he had, his last reminders of a happy L'Manburg and his friends and his *home*, smolder slowly into ash in his hands. He hadn't been fast enough to stuff them into his ender chest and now they're *gone*. Just like everything else.

Three months ago he would have screamed at Dream and tried to fight him with a shitty wooden sword. A few weeks ago he would have cried, gritting his teeth because he wouldn't give Dream the satisfaction of hearing him sob.

Now he stares at the hole where Tnret used to be with horrified detachment. He walks with absent steps, passing by the Christmas tree and Ghostbur's tent, smells the gunpowder still lingering in the air.

He's so tired. Everything is gone again, he's alone and he's just so tired. He wants to go back to L'Manburg, but not the one that's there today. The one just after the war, when Wilbur was still alive and sane and Tubbo didn't hate him.

He's never getting that back though. He knows it's all just as gone as the little home he'd built for himself here in Logstedshire.

The embers from the photo in his hand climb the paper and burn his skin. With a hiss, he lets it go on reflex and watches the paper gently float down to the sand.

Rubbing his burned hand absently, a spark of anger lights in Tommy's chest. Dream's a shit friend, he decides. The *shittiest* of friends. Who the hell is he to tell him what to do?

Tommy's a shit person, selfish and reckless. Dream had taught him that much, but so what? If Dream wanted reckless, Tommy would *give* him reckless.

With a burst of dark anger, Tommy rips his communicator off his arm, throwing it at the rocky ground and watches as the screen cracks. He kicks it with all his strength and immediately regrets it when it hurts him more than the comm. He swears loudly and hates how out-of-place it sounds in the silence of the beach.

He *hates* the silence. It's wrong, wrong and he tries to babble to break it but his throat gives up almost immediately, coughing from the soot and smoke he'd inhaled. And as the coughs shake his body and make his vision blurred with tears, Tommy decides he's *done*.

He takes deep breaths and with the desperation of a drowning man, he grabs the still-smoldering photos and throws himself at the portal. With shaking hands he carefully fans the embers until he has a small flame going. The portal lights with a purple haze and Tommy doesn't wait to step into it.

The familiar vertigo of portal-traveling envelops him, and when his eyes clear he breaks into a run. He doesn't stop until he's at his screaming station, surrounded by lava.

He's crying, he thinks, as he stares through his feet at the sea of warmth. But for the first time in a long while, his eyes shine with determination.

"I'm dying on *my* terms," whispers Tommy, voice unable to shout. "Fuck you , *Dream.* "

And he tips forward, falling into the fire.

Wraith sighs as they mine the last quartz ore from the vein they'd found, stuffing the last netherrack-covered quartz crystals into their satchel, shaking their tired arms.

They make a mental count of their to-do list, groaning at the reminder that they still need to get more blaze rods. That's going to suck.

The splash of lava reaches their ears. It's second-nature to turn around and chuck a fire-resistance potion at whoever was unlucky enough to fall into the burning liquid. Slinging their leather satchel aside, Wraith throws themselves into the lava, welcoming the familiar, harmless warmth. Still, they have a mission, so with a great push they sink, hands finding the limp body and dragging it to shore.

Carefully, Wraith lifts the unfortunate person and lays them on the netherrack, flicking the last droplets of lava off. And then they notice: "An Overworlder? Did I just save an *Overworlder?*"

Said Overworlder looks *rough* . He's so thin that Wraith thought for a second that he was a skeleton hybrid, before realizing there's still skin on his bones. Burns and cuts litter his skin over scars, blisters beginning to form on both old and fresh bruises.

One thing is clear: if Wraith leaves this person here, they will die. They are many things, but a murderer is not one of them. With worryingly little difficulty, Wraith takes the person into their arms and levitates higher into the air, taking the fast way home.

"Great, just do that, save an Overworlder you absolute fool. As if you weren't running late on potion batches," grumbles Wraith gently swerving around a lava waterfall. "And who even is this idiot, coming to the Nether without armor?"

The red mushroom-trees of the crimson forest finally come into view and Wraith breathes a sigh of relief, the last burst of speed taking them to the little hole high on the netherrack that serves as the entrance to their house.

Wraith carefully lays the Overworlder on their work table and opens the chest containing their personal potions, taking out a few before going to their first-aid chest and dragging the whole thing to beside their table.

First things first, Wraith goes to the cauldron full of lava sitting under the chimney and dips their hands in, effectively sterilizing them. Shaking off the droplets of lava, they dig out a pair of shears.

The Overworlder is dressed in what could generously be called rags, so dirty and torn that Wraith can't begin to guess what color they were originally. Those have to go if they want to see the true extent of their injuries.

Snipping away the shirt, Wraith has to take a second to breathe in and out. The sheer amount of burns, bruises, and scars are *even worse* than they'd thought at first glance. Some of the burns look explosion-related and *weeks* old. Some of the bruises look *intentional*, as if someone had gripped so hard it left hand-shaped welts circling his arms.

"What happened to you?" murmurs Wraith before shaking their head and going back to work. It takes only a few seconds to cut away the shirt, and even less to turn the shredded pants into shorts.

Reaching into their enderchest, Wraith retrieves one of their precious few water buckets and a single bottle of alcohol, quickly dousing a clean rag and wiping away the grime from the wounds.

The repetitive work allows Wraith to disconnect their mind, letting their hands move with precision. Time blurs by, and after the wounds are clean, Wraith dips a new rag into a mix of healing, regeneration, and fire-resistance potions and starts treating the wounds with it.

It would be more effective to make the Overworlder drink the potions but with that degree of malnutrition and possible dehydration, it would be a death sentence. Not to mention the blaze powder making the chances of heatstroke even worse.

Wraith curses at their forgetfulness, taking another rag and dipping it into the water bucket, gently laying it on the Overworlder's forehead. They'd honestly forgotten heatstroke was a thing, it not being a problem amongst nether mobs and hybrids except in incredibly specific situations. That also made Wraith realize they had no idea how to treat it. Or how to treat burns past immediate care.

They guess they'll have to improvise, thinks Wraith, going back to treating the wounds with the potion mixture.

Once the wounds don't look as horrifically bad, Wraith moves the unconscious Overworlder into their bed. His feet touch the floor, legs far too long to be contained to the short mattress, but Wraith has nowhere else to put him.

Now they can only wait and see, supposes Wraith.

Tommy wakes up with a throat so dry it burns. "Water..." he croaks.

Something moves on the edges of his vision, but even when he tries to focus the only thing he sees is a white blob.

He's helped into a sitting position. A cool glass bottle is pressed against his lips, and Tommy greedily drinks the water inside, chasing every last droplet with frenzied desperation.

“Do you want food?” asks someone, very far away.

“M’head hurts,” answers Tommy before he lets himself fall into the darkness again.

The second time the Overworlder wakes up, he’s only conscious for long enough to drink cold soup broth before he starts talking gibberish, clearly delusional.

It scares Wraith enough that they go to the Crimson Tribe and beg the healer piglin for help. Neethel agrees to follow Wraith back to their house and treat the Overworlder, on the condition that they use Wraith’s supplies only.

Neethel ends up scolding Wraith for pouring water on third-degree burns, hurrying to sterilize the wounds to prevent infection that has probably already set in, the skin red and raised.

“It’s not likely he’ll survive,” says Neethel, wrapping the wounds in clean gauze. *“And even if he does, the Nether is no place for a human child.”*

“He’s a child?!?” shouts Wraith, their perfect Piglish pronunciation slipping, turning their grunts shrill. *“He’s so tall I thought— Why— Where is his family?!?”*

“Only Ender knows,” Neethel snorts in response, his lips curling in disgust. *“Takes an Overworlder to abandon a child.”*

“... How old is he?” asks Wraith hesitantly.

“Old enough to begin weapons training but young enough that he wouldn’t have to worry over the adulthood trial for a while,” Neethel answers, finishing up the last bandages. He taps his hooved feet against the red-wooded floor, a gesture of anger. *“Barbarians, those humans.”*

A pang of sympathy ignites in Wraith’s chest. *“Thank you for helping, Neethel.”*

“You’re an ally of the Crimson Tribe,” answers the piglin, writing down a list of instructions for Wraith to follow. *“I am honoring that loyalty by doing this, nothing more, nothing less.”*

“I’ll be grateful for this anyways,” they answer, a bittersweet tornado of emotion whirling inside Wraith at Neethel’s words. *“I’ll float you down to the forest floor.”*

Tommy wakes up. That wasn’t supposed to happen.

His everything hurts and the heat is oppressive and trying to stand up proves to be a big mistake. He hisses as he shifts, burns dragging under the bandages he’s covered in.

“Do you want to drink?” asks a voice to Tommy’s left and he startles. He whips around to see a person, paper white, holding a bottle swirling with faint yellow liquid.

The person is hesitantly looking at him, gently bobbing up and down in a way that betrays the fact they’re floating. A set of white, dreadlock-looking tentacles grow from their head,

swaying behind them. They're wearing a leather tunic cinched together at the waist by a belt lined with pouches, all of them looking full. The tunic ends at the knees, and below—

“Where the fuck are your legs?” blurts out Tommy, his voice a painful rasp.

The person blinks, their red eyes staring at him. “I am a Ghast hybrid, so I was born without anything below the knee,” they explain, before awkwardly holding out the bottle again. “Do you, uh, want to drink?”

Tommy nods before practically snatching the bottle out of their hands, downing it in a rush.

“Careful! If you eat too fast you’ll—”

Nausea attacks Tommy, forcing him to stop and breathe, trying his best to keep the food inside of him.

“—get sick,” lamely finishes Wraith, before picking up an empty bucket and presenting it to him.

Tommy grabs the bucket and curls around it, head hanging over it just in case. After a few moments, he mumbles “I think I’m good now.”

“Right, so uh, what’s your name?” the Ghast hybrid asks, gingerly picking up the empty bottle.

“Tommy Innit, male pronouns,” he answers, carefully monitoring their face for any kind of recognition.

They nod, slipping the bottle into one of the pouches. “I’m Wraith Nili, neutral pronouns,” they answer, moving a chair closer to him and sitting down. “I found you burning in a lava pool and got you out. You’ve been out for—” they pull out a shiny pocket-watch. “Fifty-six hours, which is two days and a bit if I’m not mistaken.”

“Two days?” says Tommy, stunned. He’d thought Dream would have found him by now. Wait, *Dream*. “Shit, I need to go, I can’t stay here—!”

“Absolutely not!” interjects Wraith, their eyes narrowing.

Tommy flinches, pressing himself against the wall and raising his hands to cover his face.

The silence stretches for a few seconds.

“Did you think I was going to hit you?” they ask, mystified.

“No! Fuck off and let me leave!” Tommy says, crossing his arms and glaring at them.

“You will not ruin all my hard work by running off into your death,” they say, also crossing their arms. “Do you have anyone that can come and pick you up?”

“I—” was exiled by my best friend from the country I helped create after my father killed my brother and my other brother told me to die and my (shitty) friend will probably kill me for disobeying him “ – can take care of myself, I’m a big man, I don’t need anyone to ‘pick me up’ what is this, preschool?”

“By the Blood Lord, I didn’t know you were going to be this infuriating,” states Wraith in a single, frustrated exhale. “Go back to bed, you’re still hurt. I’ll give you more food once I’m sure you can stomach it. There are water bottles in the chest beside your bed, drink them please, you’re severely dehydrated. If you need anything else, I’ll be over there.”

With that, they turn around and float towards a row of brewing stands, placing a few water bottles and netherwart in their respective places.

While they’re distracted, Tommy takes the time to look around. There are three doorways in the room, two at the back, one near the front, no way to tell where they lead to from where Tommy’s laying. No windows, which narrows the number of escape routes possible.

The floor is made of crimson planks while the walls and ceiling are made of a random mix of quartz: bricks, pillars, smooth blocks, even chiseled quartz, placed without a pattern. The room would be pretty spacious for a bedroom, but there’s a grill over a fire pit nearby and a washbasin tucked into the corner, so Tommy guesses that Wraith’s whole house is just one room that combines bedroom, kitchen, and living room. And workspace too, judging by the amount of glistening melons and crystalized Ghast tears sitting on the shelves. Wraith’s probably a cleric or potioneer, Tommy thinks.

The soft bubbling of potions reminds him of sleeping in the drug van with everybody squished on the cold metal, the brewing stands constantly working all through the night. If he closed his eyes, he could probably pretend that the warmth comes from too many people inside the small space and that the smell of pork comes from Fundy’s pocket bacon. Maybe Tubbo’s just running a little late, getting distracted by some flowers. Maybe Wilbur’s just setting up the last of the brewing stands before going to bed, where Tommy will press his back against Willbur’s while sleepily holding Tubbo’s hand. He’ll deny being clingy in the morning but at night, with nobody there to tease him, he’ll curl into the warmth of the people he loves—

Without him noticing, Tommy’s eyes close. He falls asleep.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy wakes up with a choked cry, the last dregs of a nightmare slipping from his mind, leaving him trembling with adrenaline and no idea why.

His eyes dart around the room: it's unchanged, except for a dozen potions of regen sitting near the brewing stands. That throws him for a second: his internal clock is telling him he's slept for a long while, but since there's no day or night in the Nether, he has no way of telling how long.

Wraith is nowhere to be found.

Tommy gets out of bed, not paying attention to the flares of pain around his body (not as bad as he expected, Wraith must really know their shit), and goes for the chests.

He first finds a chest full of food and grabs a stack of cooked porkchop, stuffing it into his inventory before shutting the chest and opening the next one. Ten golden apples, pog! With a grin, he swipes them, taking a big bite from one. He can feel the absorption settling in his body with a rush of energy.

Invigorated he grins and opens the next chest, finding a few sets of iron tools. He empties that chest, thinking that even if he doesn't have a use for three iron hoes, at least he can smelt them for the iron.

From the corner of his eye, he notices a set of golden armor hanging from an armor stand near the front door. Running to it, he unhooks it and begins strapping the armor on with practiced familiar motions, feeling safer and safer with each new piece in its place.

That's when the door at the back of the room opens and Wraith walks in holding a diamond pickaxe.

Tommy freezes.

"Are you stealing from me?!?" shrieks Wraith.

On instinct, Tommy breaks into a run and lunges towards the door.

"Wait! It's dangerous—"

Slamming the door open, Tommy sees the sheer cliff right beyond the door and skids to a halt on instinct, but he'd gone too fast he's going to fall—

A pair of arms grab onto his shoulders and tug him back, making him fall backward and onto Wraith with a thump.

“Ow! Get your bony butt off me!” Wraith complains, shoving him to the side. “Can’t you stop trying to get yourself killed for five minutes?!?”

I haven’t stopped trying to get myself killed for a month now’ is what Tommy doesn’t say, scrambling to his feet instead. “You fucking kidnapped me, stop being a bitch and let me go!”

“I saved your life!” they snap back, floating back up. “Which you repaid by stealing from me! I just want to help you, why can’t you just stay put?!?”

“I need to go—” A wave of nausea climbs up Tommy’s throat and he claps a hand over his mouth. “Bucket!”

With a start, Wraith levitates until they grab the metal bucket, handing it to Tommy just in time for his food to make a burning path back up. The bitter taste of bile floods his mouth and he gags again, but there’s nothing else to throw up.

“You ate a golden apple on an empty stomach?!?” says Wraith, staring at the gold vomit with disbelief. “That is dangerous, Tommy! You’re lucky you threw it up, those things are extremely addictive!”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” groans Tommy, trying to wipe his teary eyes without them noticing. “I’ve eaten a lot gapples before and I was *fine* .”

“You’ve— Okay, no, that’s bad,” says Wraith, gently taking the bucket from Tommy’s hands. “If you don’t believe me, wait two minutes and then we’ll talk.”

“Fuck you,” answers Tommy, a brilliant response in his opinion.

The regeneration of the gapple runs out and the pain returns full force. He’s blindsided by it for a second, letting out a whimper as he fights to stay on his feet.

“I’ll help you,” says Wraith, guiding Tommy to the bed with a hand on his shoulder.

The touch burns despite how cold Wraith’s hand is, Tommy hyperaware of each movement. He doesn’t hesitate to sink onto the bed, curling up with his back against the cool quartz wall.

That clues him in that something’s wrong. Nothing in the Nether is cool. Shit, how high is his fever?

Tommy takes another gapple from his inventory, hoping the regeneration will dull the pain again—

“What did I just tell you!” shouts Wraith, their gaze narrowed. “Don’t eat any more golden apples!”

“No!” Tommy shrinks back protectively around the apple, glaring as hard as he can despite his vision starting to blur.

“Drop it!”

His breath stops.

He smells gunpowder and the white of Wraith's face melts into a familiar white mask.

He flings the gapple onto the floor and his hands fly to undo the clasps of his armor, throwing it in front of him with a loud clang. He clenches his hands over his ears, pressing himself into the wall as far as he can go.

"That's all, I don't have anymore, I'm sorry, I'm sorry--"

He shakes harder, why is it taking so long? "I really don't have anything more! Please, please don't blow up the tools--"

"--the armor," says someone, their voice coming from far away.

"What?"

"You can keep it."

He tries to make sense of the words, but they simply don't fit. "You're lying."

"I'm not."

"You're lying, you never let me keep it," Tommy says, his chest aching with lack of air, his breaths coming shorter and shallower. "Stop-- stop the bullshit, Dream."

"Who's Dream?"

Reality crashes down around him, the phantom scent of seawater leaving and he shakes his head, the worried face of Wraith coming into focus.

Shame floods his chest and the vice on his chest gets tighter. His heart beats like fireworks in his ears while his hands shake and he can't stop. He's being stupid, he's being a pussy, fuck it hurts--

"I-- What's wrong?" Wraith asks, their voice frantic. "What can I do to help?"

"Leave--" chokes out Tommy, his nails digging into the sides of his face.

Wraith bursts into their storage room and softly closes the door, collapsing on the floor.

They wrack their brain for an explanation of what that was, trying to remember anything from the books on healing they've read but they come up terrifyingly empty.

Useless, they are so useless. Can't do anything right.

Wraith lets go.

Their body loses all of its tension as their mind leaves it. Wraith sees from above as their hand dips a finger into their dye pouch and with the bright red paste writes the words “make new armor”, “hide golden apples” and “make new bed” on their arm.

On automatic, their body floats towards the chest. Wraith allows their vision to go blurry, idly listening to the clink of iron ingots dropping onto the crafting table and forming into armor. After thinking for a second, they make an armor stand too.

The easy task is done.

They float over to a contraption they made themselves: a press, gleaming iron gears keeping a heavy blackstone slab aloft. They slide a block of netherwart into the basin and crank a handle, the slab crushing the fungus. A thin stream of red liquid begins to drain from a small tube on the side of the press.

The repetitive motions allow Wraith to pull away from their body even more. They think of the things still to be done.

When they slowly pull closer into their body, they find they are stitching the leather casing of the new mattress shut, the dried netherwart serving as filling.

An idea floats into their brain and Wraith quietly inspects it, before shoving it towards their body.

It gets up and floats back into the living room, opening the door to find Tommy still shaking. The hopelessness they felt rises back to the surface, but when they are not in their body it sounds far away, as if the dark thoughts are echoing out from the bottom of a cave.

“Tommy, what’s your... fav– favorite color?” Wraith says, the words coming out as if their mouth was full of cotton.

Tommy raises his face, the scratches sluggishly bleeding down his cheeks. “Re– red.”

Wraith nods and retreats back into the storage room. They take the bowl of red liquid pressed out of the netherwart and set it to boil in their distiller. The delicate glass tube captures the water evaporated from the liquid while leaving a red paste behind that can be used as a dye.

They have a double-chest full of dye already, so they leave the distiller to do its thing, taking out the appropriate amount of weepingworm silk.

Dying silk is another of those things that a crafting table can’t do, so Wraith drops a chunk of dye in a cauldron full of water and lets the silk soak in the color.

Hiding the apples takes no more than a few seconds, mining a chunk of quartz near the ceiling and shoving a barrel in there before covering it up.

They have to wait for the silk to color. Without a task to do, it gets harder and harder to stay out of their body.

Clothes. Tommy will need clothes...

Wandering back out of the storage room, they see Tommy breathing calmer, eyes drooping with exhaustion, half-asleep on the bed.

“Hotall r’you?” asks Wraith, shaking their head before trying again. “How... tall are you?”

“Six foot three,” answers Tommy.

Wraith continues staring listlessly, an expression of light confusion dusting their features.

“Wait, you’re not American are you?” He laughs, sounding a little hysterical. “Pog. I’m a meter ninety.”

Wraith nods, going back into the storage room. After rooting around in it, they take out their dress, the lower half meant to hang to the floor and hide their lack of legs. They haven’t used this one in a long time.

They take the white clothing and float back to Tommy’s bedside. “Yours,” Wraith says, laying the clothes on the bed before immediately going back to the storage room and to the new mattress.

With dextrous fingers, they rip up the stitches, reaching over for more pieces of leather. Tommy is taller than Wraith first thought. He looked so small when sleeping...

Wraith is thrust back onto their own body. The tingly feeling all over their skin leaves, allowing them to register the spikes of pain from where they’d accidentally stung themselves with the sewing needle. A headache blooms from their head and the pit of hopelessness opens back up in their chest, but at least they can still function.

With a sigh, they go back to stuffing the mattress with more dried netherwart and stitching it shut, now the right length. They take a second, their head swimming with tiredness before they force themselves aloft.

They take out the sopping wet silk, now dyed a wonderful red color. Laying it over the mattress, they stitch the silk so it covers the leather. They can say by experience that sleeping on hot leather is not fun.

With the bed finished, Wraith straightens up smiling, and takes it into their inventory. They walk out into the main room to find Tommy, asleep on the bed.

Wraith closes the storage room door and immediately Tommy’s eyes burst open.

“Follow me. I have something to show you,” Wraith says

Tommy stands, his hands fisting the ends of the dress. He wishes Wraith was a bit more like Dream and fucking said outright what their deal is.

He’s not going to complain. He already made the mistake of having a freak-out in front of Wraith, he’s not going to do anything else to make his punishment worse.

Mutely following them, Tommy thinks they're going to the room Wraith spent most of the day in but instead, they head to the door directly beside it. Except it's not really a door. It's a shallow hole in the wall that is the right size for a door, a button on one of the sides.

Wraith presses the button— *Willbur covering the walls in buttons, maniacal glee dripping from his eyes*— and pistons fire, the two blocks of quartz retreating to open up into—

“Is that a *farm?!?*” Tommy's eyes are wide, scanning the impossibly growing melons and carrots, a small grove of oak trees growing in a corner. “How do you have so much water in the Nether? *Holy shit is that a sugarcane pond?!?*”

“Well...” Wraith begins, a proud smile on their face. “The short answer? Two layers of obsidian, a layer of ice, and then another layer of obsidian.”

Tommy gapes even wider. The room could easily fit four Camarvans and not hit the walls or ceiling, flaming hotdog included. Stepping inside the room feels exactly like stepping outside the Nether, the cool air registering as *freezing* after being in the heat for so long.

“The long answer involves a lot of testing on how to replicate the temperature of the Overworld in the Nether,” answers Wraith, gesturing for him to follow. “Keeping water from evaporating spontaneously took me *years* to achieve.”

“Why didn't you just make a farm in the Overworld?” Tommy asks. “Don't get me wrong, this is fucking impressive.”

“... I don't like the Overworld,” says Wraith, their voice somber. “Please don't ask.”

“I won't ask, I won't ask. Not a word from me,” backtracks Tommy, cursing himself for making them mad.

“Anyways, I was thinking of having you sleep in here?” says Wraith, gesturing at the middle of the tree grove. “The cool will do you good. I'm pretty sure you still have a fever and humans get heatstroke, right? Wait, are you human?”

“Yeah, I'm... actually I don't know for sure,” says Tommy, scratching his head. “Wilbur found me living in the woods, so I never knew who my parents were, but I haven't grown fucking horns or something so I'm pretty sure I'm human.”

“Huh. I don't know my sow either,” responds Wraith. “But it's pretty obvious what I am.”

“Your what?”

“Sow,” explains Wraith, setting down a few slabs of quartz, gesturing with their hands. “It's a piglin term for whoever fathered or birthed you. In the Piglin Tribes, they don't really care who you were born from, aside from the obvious exceptions of if it affects your health or, you know, incest.”

“Cool,” says Tommy, tiredly sitting on the grass floor, far too green to be in the Nether. “Are you part of a Tribe?”

A bitter smile blooms on Wraith's face. "They're *Piglin* Tribes, Tommy. What do you think?"

Tommy shuts his mouth with a click.

Wraith places a red mattress-looking thing on top of the quartz, making a bed. He just realizes that he's been sleeping on a bed that didn't catch fire. In the Nether. He'll have to ask Wraith how they made it later.

"There you go. Your own bed," says Wraith before smiling tentatively. "I can finally sleep in my own bed again."

Tommy doesn't answer, instead letting himself fall onto the bed. It's faintly damp, the cold a relief on his flushed skin. The mattress is harder but springier than the wool ones he's used to. The cloth covering it is the smoothest thing Tommy has ever touched in his *life*, even more than the expensive spider silk shirt he once stole from Eret.

"Why are you doing this?"

"Hmm?"

"You just— why the fuck are you doing this for some— some random stranger like me?" he says, his hands curling into fists, his heart beating dangerously faster. "Why are you giving me all of this pity shit?"

"It's not pity," Wraith assures, reaching out a hand towards Tommy.

He takes a step back, suddenly hyperaware of the distance between him and the exits. "Then what is it?!?"

"I..." says Wraith, taking a deep breath before looking Tommy right in the eyes. "I'm doing this because I wish someone had done this for me when I was your age."

He searches their face, looking for lies and only finding honesty.

"... Go to sleep, you look exhausted," Wraith says, hugging their arms around their chest. "We'll talk more later."

And with that, they leave.

Chapter End Notes

For starters, I retconned a few things in the first chapter, mostly because I'm setting up a few arcs and dynamics, especially around the SBI.

I'm honestly struggling with balancing Tommy's characterization, trying to keep his devil-may-care attitude and twist it the way trauma would, but I'm honestly not a psychologist.

Speaking of not being a psychologist, I tried to write Wraith as having a dissociative disorder, but that's one mental illness I don't have. If anyone has dissociated/has this disorder, feel absolutely free to correct me. I *want* to be corrected on this.

I hope I've been making Wraith an interesting character! They genuinely want to help, but they have no idea how 90% of the time. They... also have a fair bit of trauma buried.

On another note, I genuinely enjoy thinking of the ways Nether mobs and hybrids would adapt and live to the conditions of the Nether. Coming up with legitimate uses for something as useless as a netherwart block was fun! That said, I sometimes worry the long descriptions of the process bore the readers, but then I remember the whole point of this story is to regain my love of writing for the sake of writing, so perish the thought!

And thanks for reading this chapter! <3

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tubbo wakes up with paperwork stuck to his face and a crick in his neck from having fallen asleep at his desk again. He lifts his head, the paper floating onto the table, now completely unusable because of the dried drool distorting the ink. He groans, rubbing his eyes and grimacing at the taste in his mouth. When was the last time he brushed his teeth? Three, four days ago?

A knock comes from his door and Tubbo rushes to clean up his desk, hiding the ruined paperwork and trying to smooth out his presidential suit. Trying to untangle a knot of his hair from his horns, Tubbo says “come in!”

His heart stops when he sees the familiar white porcelain mask.

“Dream? What are you doing here?” asks Tubbo, his floppy goat ears folding back, his right hand dropping under his desk, ready to take out his sword from his inventory.

“Relax, Mr. President,” says Dream, holding his hands up in a show of goodwill. “I just came to talk about a mutual friend of ours in exile.”

“Wait, Tommy?” says Tubbo. “What happened?”

“Two days ago, he threw a tantrum and blew up the place he was staying at,” casually answers Dream. “And then he ran away.”

“What?!?” Panic fills Tubbo’s lungs. When he told Tommy not to become Wilbur, he didn’t mean it so literally! “Is he okay?!?”

“I dunno,” Dream answers and Tubbo wants to throttle him. Tommy could be in danger! “I’m not the one with the compass that points towards him.”

Tubbo blinks and then tugs out the silvery chain from under his coat, the compass dangling from it. The needle is spinning wildly out of control.

“No...” falls from Tubbo’s mouth. His hands begin to shake.

“Tubbo, Tubbo look at me.” A hand gently settles on Tubbo’s shoulder, and he looks up to find Dream, leaning down to be closer to his height. “Don’t panic, Tommy’s okay. He’s probably in the Nether... after I told him not to go there.”

The idea slowly registers in Tubbo’s brain and then he blushes furiously. “Sorry! Sorry, I’ve been a bit out of sorts lately and panicked.” Still, he’s relieved Dream managed to curb one of his spirals.

“It’s okay, Tubbo,” Dream says and Tubbo can hear the smile in his voice. “Why don’t you come with me to the Nether hub? That way you can assure yourself that Tommy’s alright. Maybe even get a bit of sunlight. No offense, but you kind of look like shit.”

Tubbo softly laughs, sheepishly raking a hand through his hair. “The last few days have been *rough*, man. I’ll go with you. Fresh air will do me good, I think.”

With that, he stands from his desk, wincing at the number of pops his spine makes. His firework scars twinge, now that he hasn’t been taking care of them.

Walking out of the office is a little uncomfortable as he gets looks from people. He can’t really blame them; Dream, making awkward small talk with the President of the nation he once sought to destroy? Yeah, that wasn’t in Tubbo’s list of things that could happen today,’ but there he was!

When he exits the Capitol, he’s greeted with the wooden streets of L’Manburg gently floating over the man-made lake. Tubbo smiles and steps onto the bridges, giggling when Dream stumbles a few steps, unused to the movement of the walkway.

Tubbo breathes deeply, the scent of gunpowder slowly being overpowered by the freshwater mist of the lake day by day. He greets his citizens as they pass by, their steps assured and balanced against the bobbing of the floating walkways, framed by the dark obsidian walls.

Dream was right, Tubbo thinks. He was feeling more refreshed and awake than he had in days.

“I see the reconstruction’s going well,” Dream comments, looking at the new buildings with a curious tilt to his head.

“Yeah! I’m honestly *so* glad that everyone’s worked so hard to rebuild everything,” Tubbo says, his tail swinging with excitement. “We also have a few projects planned that are going to be amazing!”

“I look forward to seeing them,” Dream answers, hands in his pockets. By then they’d reached the Nether portal, so Dream gestures with one hand towards it. “After you.”

Tubbo nods, stepping into the portal. It was always dizzying how the purple overtook his vision and left him disoriented. Still, he stepped in and was slapped by the heat of the Nether. Grimacing, Tubbo takes off his suit jacket in an attempt to relieve the heat. It didn’t do much.

He couldn’t imagine Tommy staying more than a few hours in the Nether. A stab of guilt so strong he chokes on it burns through his chest. He blinks back the sudden tears and grits his jaw. Firmly, he takes the feelings, takes the thoughts, and shoves them to the back of his mind.

He can’t afford to break down now and he’d be damned if he let himself do so. They weren’t at war, for Primes’ sake! It shouldn’t be so difficult to keep his emotions in check!

With the crackling of static, Dream steps out of the portal and Tubbo hurries to put on a relaxed and friendly mask. He's had a *lot* of practice doing that lately.

He tugs out the compass again, and he almost collapses with relief at the little arrow pointing firmly west. Tubbo's eyebrows raise sharply. That's pretty far from the portal of Logstedshire, over the lava ocean. How'd he get so far so quickly?

"See? He's fine," says Dream, looking over Tubbo's shoulder at the compass.

"Are you going to go after him?" quietly asks Tubbo.

"I'll give him a few days to calm down," assures Dream. "C'mon, let's go back to L'Manburg. All this ash is going to make me smell like a chainsmoker."

Tubbo nervously laughs, hoping that the pack of cigarettes hidden in his back pocket aren't poking out.

Stepping back into the portal, Tubbo sighs in relief at the cool air. After being in the Nether, he can't even smell the traces of gunpowder left in L'Manburg. He can look at the boulders still left, and the holes in the landscape, and the oddly bent trees and convince himself it's not that bad. At least not as bad as the Nether but then again, nothing really is.

"Thank you, Tubbo," says Dream, ruffling Tubbo's hair just like Tommy had— he cuts the thought off right there. "That reminds me, I should have done this earlier."

Tubbo tilts his head, watching as Dream takes out his hands from his pockets and holds them out to the sides, almost as if he was going to begin a speech. Then his mask cracks, the dark rifts forming an X on his face and Tubbo gasps, suddenly understanding.

Dream's feet leave the floor to levitate in place, his body shifting into the darkness of space, like someone deleted a part of the world in the vague shape of a person. His green cloak sways in an unexisting breeze, golden symbols surfacing on it, only to sink inside the green and then surface again and again.

Stars visible through his hands, now proportioned too sharply to be human, begin to move, drawing shimmering green symbols in the air in the language of code.

And then, the sound of thousands of blocks of obsidian fills the air like thunder, the tall obsidian walls around L'Manburg disintegrate in seconds, showering obsidian dust everywhere, the dust then disappearing into nothingness too.

"~~There~~" says Dream, his voice echoing like bells in a cathedral, before the cracks seal in a green flash, and just like that, he returns to being human. No matter how many times he sees Dream use the power of the god he's champion of, it never becomes less startling. "I'll be going now. Thanks for helping me, Tubbo."

"No— no problem!" Tubbo answers, mind still reeling from the change as he looks over a newly wall-less L'Manburg.

“See you later,” Dream says, throwing a half-hearted salute as he leaves.

Tubbo watches him walk away, trying to distract himself from the quiet despair that threatens to choke him. Piles and piles of paperwork await him, alongside hours and hours of arguing with Quackity over new proposals only for everything he says to be ignored.

He’s just so tired. He wants to leave the stifling suit behind, run away to where Tommy is and join him. Exile sounds like a vacation, right about now.

Violently shaking his head, Tubbo chastises himself. He gave up his *best friend* for L’Manburg, the only way to make sure it wasn’t for nothing is if he *works* for it. And in any way, Tommy hates him now. He’d just scream at him to leave.

With his back bowed with exhaustion and stress lines that make him look years older, Tubbo sighs.

Maybe he could visit Phil for a bit...

Tommy grimaces at his reflection on the mirror Wraith lent him.

Burn patchy burn scars cover his entire body in random spots, some as small as marbles, some as big as his entire hand. He’d have been just a human burn scar if it weren’t for the healing potions, but being half-charred doesn’t look any better.

There are two big scars on his face, one going from the back of his neck all the way to his cheekbones and forehead. His left ear is just... gone, only a few charred bumps remain around the hole.

The other scar goes from his collarbones and climbs to his jaw, ending just above the right corner of his lips. He tries to smile, but scars don’t really stretch, so he looks like one of those half-happy, half-sad drama masks.

He has a big scar on his left leg, covering all the way from his ankle to his knee, there are a few small ones dotting his right shoulder, there’s even a few on the bottom of his feet. He stops trying to take stock of how many there are. There are just too many.

Instead, he goes back to trying to tame his hair with his fingers. It’s grown past his ears, almost brushing against his collarbones. It’s been growing since Pogtopia, more because he forgot to cut it than wanting to have long hair. Pogtopia... Prime, how long ago was that? More than a year, he’s sure.

Tommy angrily blows a lock of hair away from his face.

Wraith clears their throat and lays a single leather hair tie on the table beside them. Without saying anything, they go back to brewing.

He hesitantly takes the tie, not saying anything in return, and begins tying his hair up.

After Wraith gifted him the bed, things have been a bit... odd? Not really odd, more like neither of them was used to talking about emotional shit, and Wraith offering that tiny bit of honest truth had both of them just... not talking about it. Tommy stopped rejecting their things, at least. It helped knowing it wasn't from pity.

Still, Tommy was going a little fucking bonkers being stuck inside. He had already told off Wraith for not having cobblestone in their house for two hours straight, but they had the patience of a fucking saint and still forced Tommy to stay on bed rest. At least he had been allowed to use Wraith's bed while they were working.

"I'm *bored*," whines Tommy, flopping on the bed. "Can I help with the potions?"

"No," immediately answers Wraith. "No matter how good your brother was at them, I don't trust you with them."

Considering Tommy has accidentally broken four water bottles so far, that's fair. It's not his fault he keeps flinching at every noise, but he can't help that. UND

He grumbles, loudly. "Come oooooon," he complains, flopping down on the bed, his burns twinging a little. "I want to do *something*."

Wraith doesn't answer, reaching over to their enderchest to take out a bucket of milk and putting it near the counter.

Tommy stares at the chest for a second, the purple particles floating around it and without his input, he says "Hey, can I play some music?"

Wraith stops, looking at him with raised eyebrows. "Sure."

He walks over to the enderchest, opening the latch. Inside, there is a starry void where his items float. He plunges his hand into the cold space, pulling out the jukebox. Then he pauses, looking at the four discs inside his chest.

He takes his time, running his hands over the grooves, recalling the melodies in his head. Tubbo would sometimes tease him about how much he took to choose which disc to play or how he would listen to a disc non-stop one day and then refuse to even hear the intro notes the next.

But there is a reason, Tommy thinks, as he picks Chirp and lets it fall into the slot.

Soon, the melody starts, calm and echoey. He closes his eyes and the images of snow and a cozy cottage drift onto his mind. The scent of blue dye and sheep wool fills his senses, phantom hay scratching up his legs. Contentment rises in his chest, filled with an undercurrent of sadness buried so deep it's almost not there.

"Hi Ghostbur," Tommy whispers.

The music responds, happily crescendoing before drifting back into contentment. The sound of plowing fields and the flap of wings echo from the depths of the disc.

“You’re staying with Techno and Phil?” he whispers, a pit of bitterness opening in his chest. The answering cheery notes make Tommy’s fists curl.

Still, the disk continues flitting with the thoughts flying through Ghostbur’s head. The phantom sensation of petting Friend makes Tommy relax. He still doesn’t like how far-away the music sounds ever since Wilbur died.

He wishes he still had Cat. Cat had always sounded like Tubbo.

Tommy looks up to see Wraith looking at him strangely. He just flips them off and walks back to the bed, ignoring how the tips of his ears are definitely red. Ear. The tip of his only remaining ear. That’s going to be a fucking trip to get used to.

Instead, he goes back to bed, the exhaustion that’s become his new normal since exile making his limbs heavy. He closes his eyes, listening to Ghostbur from the notes of Chirp.

Phil shakes snow off his wings as he enters Techno’s small cottage, hurrying to close the door as the blizzard intensifies.

His hands shake, his ears and cheeks numb. He’s used to the cold, but he thought the weather would be good enough to go without his heavy winter cloak for a bit. He was wrong, but the thought of going into the nether with such heavy clothing is tantamount to suicide.

Heavy steps come from the second floor and Techno descends the stairs. His pink hair is in a messy braid in the process of falling apart, while there are a few lapis stains on his fingers.

“Did you find ‘im?” asks Techno, shaking out his hands.

“No,” sighs Phil, taking off his striped bucket hat and running a hand through his blond hair. “He went into the Nether and after a point, his footsteps just end. I’m thinking he took a fire-resistance pot and swam in the lava.”

“That’s gonna make finding him a pain,” grunts Techno, tugging off his crown and undoing his braid.

With a small smile, Phil moves to the couch, and with a short few flaps of his wings, he perches on the armrest.

“Please don’t make holes in the armrest again,” says Techno, plopping himself down heavily on the couch.

“Can’t help the talons, mate,” says Phil, taking the brush from the bedside table and combing through the tangles on Techno’s hair. “But I’ll try.”

Techno grumbles in protest, but his shoulders are already beginning to relax. “Why are you goin’ after Tommy? He made it clear he didn’t want to see you.”

Phil sighs, his wings drooping. “Techno, you can’t keep being mad at your brother.”

“He betrayed me, Phil! And he isn’t my brother, I barely know him!”

A pang of regret makes Phil stop his brushing. Techno’s not really lying; Wilbur was the one that found Tommy alone in the forest, Wilbur was the one that convinced Phil to let Tommy stay, Wilbur was the one that took care of Tommy when both Phil and Techno left in search of new lands and adventure.

At the time he’d thought Wilbur was capable enough to take care of Tommy, but now, after having put a sword through his only biological son, he realized he had made a mistake. He’d forgotten how it was to be young and left a seventeen-year-old to parent a practically feral eleven-year-old alone.

Techno had spent almost two years with his brothers before being away for five. No wonder he doesn’t think of them as his brothers.

“...He may not be your brother, Techno, but he’s still my son, just like you are,” Phil answers, starting to brush the pink hair again. “I want him safe, and staying for so long in the nether is not safe.”

Techno sighs, but he doesn’t complain further. “Are you going back to L’Manburg soon?”

“Not until Tommy’s found, at least,” answers Phil, setting the brush aside and dividing Techno’s rosy mane in three. “I might go visit for a few days. Tubbo’s struggling with being President quite a bit, and he’ll want news of how my search is going.”

“Fuck the government, Phil,” grumbles Techno, but there are rumbles deep inside his chest that tell Phil he’s comfortable and warm, close to falling asleep. “It only makes things worse.”

“That it does,” agrees Phil, finishing the braid with a golden hair tie. “That it does.”

Chapter End Notes

I am unnaturally motivated for this story what the hell. Anyways! Here we introduce the *plot*! And introducing multiple characters into the action too! Things are finally lifting off!

I have sooooo much worldbuilding centered around the gods of the SMP. I hope you guys liked Dream's godly design! And yes, Dream and DreamXD are different entities in this fic.

Also I enjoyed giving Tommy a reason to love the discs so much and give him some mental fuckery to go with Techno's voices and Phil's crows.

Thank you so much for reading!!!!

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

WARNING! If you have something against worms or being forced to vomit, please skip parts of this chapter!

Worms: skip from “Dig in,” until “Wraith is munching on the last of their mushrooms, before biting the stick they were impaled on.”

Forced vomit: skip from “Even if you already ate it—” until “You must be hungry.”

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“C’mon, c’mon,” mutters Tommy, hitting the obsidian as hard as he can with his iron pick. He strains his hearing for the sound of Wraith coming back in, but the strike of metal drowns almost everything. He glances back to the oak tree he just replanted, mentally willing it to grow faster.

He should have gotten bone meal while he had the chance. Fuck, he’s going to get caught and it’ll be just like—

His mind skips over that like the needle of a jukebox over a scratched disc, his hands hitting the obsidian harder.

“Stupid— fucking— obsidian!” he grits out, watching as the cracks in it get wider and it begins bleeding that weird purple liquid. “Break already, bitch!”

It finally cracks, falling into useless chunks the size of his fist, and he shovels them out with his hands until he has barely enough space to shove a chest in there. He strains his hearing again... nothing, just the bubbling of lava and the flying sparks that are always in the Nether.

He reaches into his inventory to grasp the three apples that he’d managed to get from the tree and throws them into the chest. Then, he takes the five gold blocks he’d stolen.

It had been a fucking surprise to go into Wraith’s storage room to find a double-chest almost full to the brim with gold *blocks* . Not even ingots, just obscene amounts of gold blocks. Why the fuck would they have so much gold, Tommy had no idea.

He then shoves a few other things into the chest; strips of dried pork, a few water bottles, some bandages, a brewing stand he’d just made along with ingredients for healing pots.

He wracks his brain for anything else to put in it but he can’t fucking think so he just closes the chest and buries it under the dirt, patting it down until it looks indistinguishable from the rest of the dirt in the room.

He stands, breathing quietly. “He didn’t find your chest under the tree,” he reminds himself. “It was the only fucking thing he didn’t find, you can do this, you can keep this a secret, you can—”

His resolve breaks and he digs the chest back up, he’s about to dump the contents out when the shine of gold catches his eye and he finds himself grabbing one of the fresh apples and a gold block and running towards his crafting table.

Making a golden apple takes only a second, placing the ingots and apple in the correct places of the crafting table and letting the runes on it do the rest, before he takes a big bite and swallows.

The effect is immediate, the regeneration of the apple dulling the constant low pain in his feet and back, the absorption settling over him like a comfortable blanket. He smiles, his hands steady and confident for the first time in forever. Golden apples are *amazing*.

With his back straight and steps certain, Tommy places the leftover gold ingot in the chest and closes the lid, burying the chest back up and smoothing the dirt in a much better way than the piss-poor job he’d done before.

With a spring in his step, he stands up and walks towards his iron hoe. He swings it a few times as if it was a sword, like he used to do when he was a kid before Phil gave the okay to start his fighting lessons, and laughs, the sound so foreign he startles himself.

He stands still, blinking, heart racing, before he laughs again at himself and walks over to the watermelons growing in neat rows. He gets to work, using the hoe to snap the stem of the watermelons and picking them up to pile them in a corner of the room.

To be honest, the work hurts and he’s tired minutes into harvesting, but he likes this kind of stuff. Not really farming, that was more Techno’s thing, but being *useful*. This way staying with Wraith feels less like pity and more like he’s just renting a room.

Actually, yeah! He’s just renting a room in the Wraith Hotel until he’s healed and then he’ll go back to L’Manburg! If... if they want him back.

The smile on Tommy’s face dims.

Of *course*, they want him back! He’s Tommy Innit, *the* big man, he’ll walk in the door and—

He’s never been good at plans, why the fuck is he trying to make one now? He’ll wing it like he always does and everything will be fine! He *will* be fine. He’ll figure something out, everything will be fine—

His absorption runs out.

He suddenly becomes aware that his back is facing the door. Fumbling with his hoe, Tommy turns around so he can keep the door in his sights and goes back to harvesting watermelons.

Just think about harvesting. Only about harvesting. Maybe Wraith will agree to lend him the diamond pickaxe to go mining if he gives them enough stuff. He wants strong armor, not the

iron he's stuck with.

He's harvesting the sugar cane when Wraith's voice comes from the central room. "Tommy?"

"Over here!" he calls back, using the hoe to break sugar cane and using one of the long leaves on it to tie it together into a small bundle, piling it up with the rest.

Wraith pushes the button (*blackstone walls surround him, Eret's white eyes scrunching up in triumph, "it was never meant to be"*) and enters into the small obsidian-walled garden, a leather satchel slung over their shoulder.

His breathing gets faster but he's not going to have another fucking meltdown so he grips the hoe tighter and ignores how sweaty and overheated he suddenly feels.

Tommy's thoughts all turn to the small patch of dirt where his hidden chest is. He wants another golden apple so goddam badly but he forces his eyes to follow Wraith.

They seem concerned to see him standing, but then their eyes catch the pile of fruit and vegetables and their eyes widen with surprise. Tommy also notes how their short hair-tentacles spread wider in surprise too.

"Did you do that?" they ask, looking from him to the harvest. "And you feel okay?"

His hands are shaking and his heart is racing, his muscles are crying out in pain and there are new blisters forming on his hands. He feels as if he'd been sparring for *hours* even though he knows it couldn't have been that long.

"I'm fine," he answers instead, trying to sound as intimidating as possible. "This is my payment for letting me stay. I don't owe you *shit* , okay?"

They open and close their mouth a few times, before answering: "Alright." They float closer to the harvest and Tommy moves away, out of reach from them. "You have *no* idea how much this helps me. I've been stressing out for days over my potion batches being late!"

They smile, taking the things into their inventory, before looking at Tommy. "You want to come with me? I'm preparing some food and you *really* need to eat."

Tommy shrugs and then gets stuck in an awkward staring contest with Wraith, neither of them moving. Wraith finally takes the lead and gets out of the room first and Tommy follows.

Wraith goes to the kitchen part of the main room and takes out a long weeping vine from a boiling cauldron, before peeling the red... well, Tommy guesses it would be like the skin of the plant but it looks more like a mess of string? Then, they sprinkle a bunch of powders on the plant, then put the weeping vine on the grill and Tommy watches it as it fizzes, a disconcertingly meat-like smell coming from it.

Vaguely remembering where the cutlery is, Tommy rummages in the cabinets below the smooth quartz kitchen countertop and takes out the only two sets of the wooden utensils. He places them on the table and then sits on one of the two seats.

He watches as Wraith takes the carrots and cuts them up, cutting a few mushrooms too before taking the sugarcane and peeling it, cutting the core of it into sticks before using them to impale the carrots and mushrooms, setting them to grill beside the weeping vine and sprinkling them with more powders.

After that, they take some of the watermelons and make juice with it, finishing just in time to take the vine and vegetables out of the grill, placing them on Tommy's plate.

"Dig in," Wraith says, setting a glass of juice in front of Tommy, before starting to eat from their own food.

Tommy first pokes the vine with his fork, before cutting a small chunk of it and biting. "What the fuck? It tastes like meat!"

"It is meat," Wraith answers, taking a bite out of their own vine. "These are weeping worms."

"What."

"They look like plants, but they're actually worms. It's an easy mistake to make, but the real weeping vines aren't edible—"

Tommy gags, unable to keep looking at his plate. He just ate a fucking worm thicker than a fucking eyeball, what the *fuck*.

"If you don't want to eat it, you don't have to," Wraith says, but their head-tentacles are swaying more agitatedly and their lips are pursed in frustration, their hand extending towards Tommy's plate.

"*No!*" Tommy shouts, quickly snatching the plate away before Wraith can take it.

The shout makes Wraith take their hand away as if it had been burned. "... I won't take it away, then," they say, glancing at Tommy, before saying so quietly it's almost a whisper: "I know what it's like to starve."

Wraith begins eating again, both of them stuck in awkward silence.

Tommy decides to take a few bites of mushroom and carrot. It is the most delicious thing he's ever tasted. Actually, Niki's pastries might have them beat but he's been fucking starving for two months. His shitty attempts at roasted chicken would probably taste like heaven about now.

He then looks at the grilled worm. He doesn't want to do this, but Wraith had sounded annoyed at him for not eating the worm, and the longer he doesn't eat it, the more panic-fueled static creeps upon his chest.

With apprehension, he cuts another small chunk and spears it on his fork. He closes his eyes and takes a bite.

It... doesn't taste bad. If he didn't know it was a worm, he'd have a hard time telling it apart from a sausage. It has some weird earthy undertone and it's a little springier than regular

meat, but it is... kind of good.

Wraith is munching on the last of their mushrooms, before biting the stick they were impaled on.

Tommy stares, but then Wraith notices and takes the stick out of their mouth. "Have you never eaten sugar cane before?"

"You can eat it?"

"Well, yes and no," they answer. "Just bite the sugar cane and drink the juice. *Don't* swallow the wood part. And be careful with splinters!"

Tommy looks at part of the stick free of vegetables and shrugs before biting down. A burst of sweetness spreads through his tongue and drips down the sides of his mouth. A pleased gasp escapes him before he bites again.

He imagines telling Tubbo about this, giving him a stick and eating until they're buzzing around with the sugar high, their sticky hands trying to steal each other's leftover sugar cane.

He smiles, but a pit of homesickness robs him of the last of his appetite.

He's barely eaten half his meal but his stomach is full to bursting. He can't eat another bite. Any more and he'll throw up.

Wraith has already finished, idly biting their stick while they quickly dunk the blackstone plate in the lava cauldron to clean it.

Tommy has the impulse to hide the rest of his food, but his hastily-made shorts don't have any pockets and it'd be painfully obvious if he hid it in his shirt. Wraith turns around and sees his plate before he has the opportunity to think of anything else.

"You're full?" asks Wraith, before slapping a hand to their forehead. "I am an *idiot*. I'm supposed to be giving you smaller portions! I completely forgot!"

("Even if you already ate it—" says Dream, twirling Tommy's stone sword in his hands. "You know all gifts have to be inspected by me, right?"

"How the fuck are you going to do that—"

Dream hits him in the stomach with the sword's blunt side, making him double over, and grabs his hair.

Tommy opens his mouth to scream before the handle of his sword is shoved deep into his mouth, forcing him to choke and gag and vomit.

Bad's gift of cooked chicken splats onto the bottom of the hole over his set of armor, and through blurry eyes he sees Dream toss the stone sword into the hole too, throwing a stick of dynamite after it.

He flinches back at the sound of the explosion.

“Come on, your breath stinks. I have some water I can give you,” Dream says, gently helping Tommy to his feet. “I also have some cake, if you want it. You must be hungry.”)

“—ommy? Are you okay?”

He nods.

“Alright,” Wraith says, handing him a piece of cloth. “Wrap your food in this and you can take it to the greenhouse. This should be enough for your dinner, I think? Neethel didn’t tell me how big the portions should be aside from ‘small’ so—”

Tommy takes the cloth and shoves the food inside, bunching it up before breaking into a sprint to the greenhouse, punching the button to open up the door. He sprints to his patch of dirt and roughly digs up the chest, grabbing a handful of gold blocks and an apple, almost eating the gapple off the crafting table.

But the absorption is not enough. He still has the phantom taste of vomit on his mouth and his stomach is rebelling against himself and he *can’t fucking breathe—*

Dream sits at the tip of an obsidian spire, idly throwing an ender pearl up and down. Through the mirage the rising hot air creates, he watches the doorway hidden high up in the netherrack.

No wonder Tommy hadn’t come back! He’d found an unlikely ally to protect him from the big bad Dream.

He chuckles, his smile widening behind his mask.

He’d been surprised when he couldn’t recognize whoever floated down from the entrance. They were clearly part human, but they hadn’t been anyone Dream knew or whitelisted.

It was his SMP they were in, he should have been notified if someone entered, just like the first time Schlatt snuck in.

Yet, they were there, obviously harvesting blocks of netherwart from the trees.

The only logical explanations would be that they were living in the Nether since before he claimed the area of the Greater Dream SMP as his own, or that they were born here.

It was a ridiculous notion. Not even Sapnap would have been able to survive the Nether without Bad’s care. But here they were.

Well, this situation has certainly given him the opportunity to tie two loose ends.

Wraith finishes corking the last of the potions they need just as a knock sounds on the door.

They freeze. Never, not once in their life, has anyone knocked on Wraith's door.

They lunge for their leather satchel, quickly retrieving two powerful splash potions of harming, holding them in their hand. Carefully, they near the door.

Wraith takes a deep breath before yanking the door open.

There's no one there.

They stand confused at the entrance until they glance down. There's a metallic... thing the size of their forearm, sleek and technological. Wraith picks it up, turning it around to find cracked glass. Frowning, they go back inside and close the door.

"Tommy?" calls Wraith, before pushing the button and heading into the greenhouse.

"Hmm?" He says, sleepily lifting his head from the bed. His eyes are red and puffy, but Wraith knows better than to ask if he was crying.

"Do you know what this is?"

"That's my communicator," he says, suddenly looking wide awake. "Where did you find it?"

"Outside the front door."

Tommy takes it from Wraith's hands as if it was going to explode at any moment. He taps at the screen and Wraith drifts closer in interest when the screen lights up. The screen reads: 'You left this - :)'

The communicator slips through Tommy's fingers and falls to the floor.

"Tommy, what's wrong?" Wraith asks, looking at how his face pales.

"He found me," he says in a horrified whisper.

"Who?!?"

Wraith receives no answer as Tommy throws himself to the ground and starts digging with his hands.

"What the- what are you doing?" asks Wraith, until they see the chest buried inside. "*Did you break my floor ?*"

He doesn't answer, instead dumping all of the contents of the chest into his inventory and sprinting out the door. Or at least he tries, because Wraith floats into the middle of his path, arms spread wide. "Tommy, stop!"

"Out of my way, bitch!" he snarls, summoning his iron sword from his inventory.

"I will! I will move aside, but *please* explain what's going on," Wraith says, keeping the iron sword always in their sights.

Tommy keeps looking at them, nervous energy vibrating in his body, and Wraith finds the whole situation eerily similar to facing down a hoglin near the warped forest, never knowing if their fear is going to win over their aggression.

“Fuck, what is there to explain? Dream found me, and I should go back to him before he—” he catches himself, his brows furrowing. “No! I shouldn’t go back, he’s a shitty friend. But he’ll probably make things worse if I don’t—”

“Who is Dream?” asks Wraith, trying to distract Tommy from his confusion. “Isn’t he the one who hurt you? Why are you calling him a friend?”

“He did hurt me, but it was for my own good. He’s the only one that cared,” answers Tommy, but something about his answer rubs Wraith the wrong way. Maybe the way it sounds practiced?

“I... don’t think friends are supposed to hurt you,” says Wraith, their hand sneaking over to their splash potion of weakness.

“Then what is he?” asks Tommy, finally lowering his sword, frowning at the ground.

Wraith waits with bated breath as Tommy thinks, a hundred different emotions passing through his face that they can’t even begin to recognize. But then his eyes widen with an epiphany and Wraith gets ready to run or fight.

“He was there to watch me,” he says, a spark that had been absent lighting in his eyes. Huh. Wraith thought his eyes were gray, but there’s a light dusting of blue that hadn’t been there before.

“So what are you going to do?” asks Wraith, marginally calmer since Tommy doesn’t seem to be fighting himself anymore.

“I don’t fucking know, but one thing’s for sure,” he says, his voice certain. “I’m not going back to him.”

“Well, uh, good thing you figured that out,” says Wraith, mystified at the weirdness of the whole situation. “If you’re going to run from him, why don’t you come with me to the Crimson Tribe?”

“Is this a pity thing?” angrily asks Tommy.

“No!” hurries to clarify Wraith. “I was planning to go there anyway to sell my potions. And I’m not staying here if the house is being watched by someone capable of hurting a *child*.”

“Hey, I’m not a kid!” Tommy protests.

“You’re not? But Neethel said— Nevermind,” Wraith shakes their head. “We are leaving right now. Tommy take your bed with you and hide the entrance to the greenhouse.”

With an objective to do, Wraith is calmer. The first things to go into their inventory are the usuals: food for the road, their only diamond pickaxe, materials for shelter.

The rest isn't: their brewing stands, the cauldron, the grill, all of their valuables. Soon, their inventory and enderchest are full to the brim.

"I'm done," says Tommy, coming into the main room. Wraith glances behind their shoulder to see the greenhouse perfectly hidden behind two blocks of quartz. Tommy even knew to take away the water so the sound wouldn't give the room away.

"Tommy, follow me," Wraith says and both of them hurry to the storage room. "Please help me with this. Take as much as you can with you."

"You're trusting me with this?" he says, looking at the sheer amount of gold in the chest.

"I'm taking you with me, aren't I?" answers Wraith, smiling softly before digging into another chest for their spare set of armor and hurriedly strapping it on.

When they turn back, Tommy has already put on his own armor and the gold chest has only a few stacks left in it.

"Alright, we can't go out the front door," says Wraith, gesturing with a hand for Tommy to follow them. "I have another way out but you'll have to crawl a bit at the end." Wraith comes to a stop where the grill and cauldron full of lava used to be, right under the chimney.

"Give me your hands and don't let go, we're flying out of here," says Wraith, extending their hands towards him.

Tommy takes the hands in a death grip, making his skin just as pale as Wraith's.

Wraith begins floating up the chimney, the space just barely wide enough for one person, Tommy hanging from their hands.

And they float up and up until the tunnel begins to slant to the right, until Wraith's forced to put Tommy's hands on the netherrack and let go, floating ahead.

They float out the chimney to the crimson forest stretching on for miles under them, the red particles of the nether floating around in mesmerizing dances, a living spectacle the color of freshly spilled blood.

Turning around, Wraith makes a little netherrack platform just in time for Tommy to crawl out, covered top-to-bottom in soot and charcoal dust, coughing and hacking, but alive in a way they hadn't seen from the start.

They grin at each other, shaky from adrenaline but determined, and make their way down to the forest below.

Writer struggles: frantically googling “how does grilled worm taste” and not finding a satisfying answer because there aren’t edible worms the thickness of a human wrist.

Also, researching for this? I did not know what refeeding syndrome was and now I do and it is fucking terrifying. Imagine that, not being able to much eat after starving because it could literally kill you. And you have food in front of you. That’s just straight-up Tantalus’s torture with a twist.

In another note, eating sugar cane? Delicious. My mother lived in the middle of a sugar cane plantation and once took us there and taught us how to eat it. The sheer amount of cane we ate was ridiculous and I’m still in awe of the sugar rush that followed because, keep in mind that sugar cane juice is just water and sugar. It was worth it though. Would do it again.

Next chapter we meet the Crimson Tribe!

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy swears quietly, trying to plaster himself over the red trunk of a crimson shroom-tree, hearing clops of hooves over the nylum pass by, the loud swine exhales creeping closer.

He's so fucking glad he learned how to be quiet during exile. Hunting food back then was *so* much easier than trying to sneak around the hordes upon hordes of hoglins wandering around the forest.

Wraith gestures to him, a piece of netherrack in their hand. 'Follow me,' Wraith mouths, before throwing the netherrack as far as they can.

With practice born out of hundreds of pranks, Tommy breaks into a run the second the netherrack piece hits the branches of a nearby tree. Wraith follows behind him, but soon Tommy's gaining ground.

"What the— run faster!" he screams.

"I can't float any faster!" they scream back.

The Hoglin grunts start to get louder again and Tommy panics. He feels a tug in his stupidly long dress, but he doesn't stop running, instead screaming his head off as he hears the stampede of hoglins squeal bloody murder.

"THERE'S A LAVA RAVINE TO OUR LEFT!" screams Wraith, looking like a kite flying behind Tommy, holding on by the end of Tommy's dress. "GO THERE!"

"AAAAAAAAAAAA," Tommy answers, running in that direction, the edge of the ravine growing closer. And then a Hoglin's tusks catch his back and send him flying through the air.

He's yanked to a stop in the air, the edge of his shirt digging into his throat as he dangles from it, Wraith struggling to keep both of them aloft. There's a tense, infinite moment as he slowly slips from his shirt, the heat of the lava below him scratching at his face.

And then Tommy's dumped on the other side of the ravine, the hoglins snorting violently from their side. Fuck, now he's full of netherrack dust, great. Wraith crashes to the ground beside Tommy, panting.

"I shouldn't have floated so much yesterday," groans Wraith, reaching into their inventory and taking out a bucket of lava, and then proceeds to drink it.

"What the fuck are you doing?" asks Tommy, looking as Wraith takes another long gulp of lava.

“I need to drink it,” explains Wraith. “Ghasts eat lava, and I need it to feed my ghast abilities like my floating.”

“Is that why you were so slow?” says Tommy, shrugging off the weirdness of watching someone drink lava. He’d watched Phil instinctively try to preen them even if none of them had feathers, multiple times. He could deal with some weirdness.

“No, my floating only has one speed which is slower than running. We’ve just never had to run,” says Wraith before finishing the rest of the lava in one long gulp. “Urgh. I think if we have to run again, you’ll have to drag me.”

“So you’ll be like a fucking balloon, great,” answers Tommy, standing up and dusting himself off as best he can.

“We should probably set up camp,” says Wraith, lifting off the floor. “We’re tired enough.”

“Yeah, sure, my sleep schedule is fucked anyways,” grumbles Tommy.

“That wall over there looks promising,” says Wraith, floating over to the red outcropping, mining the netherrack, and swatting at the nylium roots so they stay out of the way.

The hole Wraith makes is barely big enough to lay both their beds down, lit by a single torch. It’s just a temporary shelter, but Tommy couldn’t help the cold dread that runs through his veins at the idea of staying in a place so small.

“Are you coming?” says Wraith, placing their bed down and unhooking the leather satchel from their shoulder.

“C’mon, don’t be a fucking pussy,” muttered Tommy under his breath, a habit he’d picked up from exile. “Yeah, yeah, I’m coming.”

With shoulders in a rigid line, Tommy walks into the small shelter and lays down his bed, carefully ignoring how his heartbeat’s starting to pick up. He plops his bed down, as close to the exit as he could get it, with more force than necessary.

Tommy lets himself fall onto the soft mattress and takes off his boots, massaging his feet with a grimace. He has a few blisters here and there, but his feet hurt in the *strangest* of places. The soles he can understand, but why the hell would the skin at the base of his toenails hurt?

“We have traveled for four hours, give or take,” said Wraith, consulting their shiny pocket watch. “So we’re past the half-way point. We should be arriving soon if we keep this pace up.”

And then Wraith blocks the entrance with more netherrack, sinking them into darkness broken only by the eerie, flickering fire.

Cold static climbs into Tommy’s head, his mind screaming about being in a cage, being trapped, he needs air, *he needs air*.

“Tommy?” says Wraith, mouth half-full with food. “Are you alright?”

“Why the fuck wouldn’t I be?” he almost growls, but his voice cracks at the last second.

Wraith doesn’t answer, instead looking at Tommy with barely concealed panic. “Uh, are you going to start shaky-breathing again?”

Tommy doesn’t answer, instead trying to convince his stupid chest from *imploding what the fuck*. He digs his nails into his scalp, finding the edges of wounds and tearing them open.

“Oh, bloody Lord,” exhales Wraith in a panicky whisper. “Oh, uh. Music! Music calms you down right? Do you want your jukebox?”

Tommy weakly nods, and Wraith places down the enderchest. With numb, clumsy fingers he pulls out the jukebox and places it down, not pausing to search for a disk before slotting it in, gripping the wood of the box as hard as he can.

The twinkling notes of Far bloom into being the way snowflakes land on the ground, softly and calmly. The sound of cold air rushing by fills his senses, the feeling of being free invading his mind. Bittersweet anger sours in Tommy’s mouth.

He’s playing Far, his “father’s” disk. His thoughts on it had always been complicated. Every time he played it he was reminded his father had better things to do than pay attention to him, concentrating on whatever project had caught his fancy. Sometimes he’d scream at the disk for hours, trying to drown out the notes with the insults he never had the courage to tell Philza.

Other times, like now, he was lucky. Phil is flying.

Phantom wings beating over strong currents, eyes sharper than a human’s scanning the horizon. Trees and rivers and mountains passed by faster than he could ever hope to go, becoming nothing but tiny blurs. He could *taste* the freedom. It felt natural. It felt *right*.

He could almost pretend it was him, high up in the skies where nobody could touch him, where his racing heartbeat because of the adrenaline and not fear. The wind ruffling his feathers as he soared on the currents, giving a piercing screech before folding his wings into a dive, eyes trained on his prey.

He barely felt it when Wraith lifts him from where he’d leaned against the jukebox and instead placed him on his bed, the exhaustion of the day catching up to him.

Wraith had been anxiously waiting for Tommy to wake up for *hours* now. They’d re-checked the route several times, cooked some food, opened their hiding place, mended some clothes they had been putting off for months and Tommy still wasn’t awake.

Well, they didn’t know if Tommy waking would be good or not, they kind of wanted to procrastinate on talking to him a bit more, but after yesterday this really couldn’t go on.

Wraith had been debating the pros and cons of poking Tommy with a stick when he stirred with a groan.

“Hi! I made uh, breakfast? Is breakfast what you eat in the morning or what you eat after you wake up? I never knew the difference, um.”

“Just— just spit it out already,” sighs Tommy, blearily taking his unfinished mushrooms-and-carrot-on-a-sugarcane-stick and biting into it.

“... we need to talk about those, shivery-breath things,” says Wraith.

Tommy stiffens but he doesn't say anything.

“You don't need to tell me about why, I just need to know what to do,” explains Wraith, taking their bed back into their inventory. “And what things get you like this.”

He takes an angry bite out of his food and Wraith internally grimaces. They *really* should have talked to more people and maybe they would have half a clue on how not to mess this up. Right, uh. Piglin principles have always worked, right? So give and take in kind.

“If it makes you feel better I can tell you about my floating?” Wraith then realizes their mistake and hurries to correct it. “Not my literal floating! That's another thing entirely. I mean that sometimes I kind of... leave my body? I feel like I'm watching myself from above and I can't feel much of anything. It's like I'm a ghost. Or a specter! I'm 'spectating' myself, I guess.”

“That's *weird*, ” says Tommy, but at least he doesn't look as angry and defensive anymore.

“It is,” agrees Wraith. “I get like that whenever things get too much. Too many... hateful thoughts, I guess? And... the sound of nether portals. Sheep being hurt. The smell in the Overworld after it rains.”

There's a second of silence.

“I sometimes freak out for no fucking reason,” says Tommy, bunching his hands in the extra fabric of his shirt. “Can't breathe when that happens.”

He then clears his throat, uncomfortably looking at the walls, and runs a hand through his hair. “I don't like small spaces. And explosions. Water on— on my face. Don't touch my hair or make me give up my stuff. And... buttons. The sound of a button getting pushed.”

“Right,” nods Wraith. There are a few seconds where they both fidget in place. “We should get going.”

Wordlessly, Tommy puts his stuff back into his inventory and both of them walk out of their hiding place.

Wraith spies the tops of the tents and can't help the smile that bursts in their face.

“ *Wraith! Good hunting!* ” greets one of the tribe's piglin, gold axe slung over one shoulder and a Hoglin corpse on the other.

“Lethi! Good hunting to you as well!” they greet back.

“I wasn’t expecting you for a while now,” Lethi comments, readjusting the corpse over their shoulder. *“And who is this?”*

“This is Tommy,” explains Wraith gesturing to him, who tenses his shoulders. *“I rescued him from some lava and now he’s staying with me.”*

Lethi stares at Tommy, their snout twitching and inhaling deeply. Piglins’ sense of smell is a hundred times better than their vision, and Wraith wonders what Lethi finds out with it. Tommy looks ready to bolt.

“Alright, I ain’t gonna stop ya,” Lethi finally says, shrugging. *“But you better talk to Matee about this.”*

“Thank you,” answers Wraith, releasing a sigh of relief they didn’t even know they were holding. *“Are you returning to the village?”*

“That I am,” they answer, hoisting the golden axe over their shoulder, the golden bangles around their tusks glinting in the low light.

“I’ll accompany you, then!”

Lethi smiles, their ears flicking in amusement.

“Come on Tommy, the Tribe should be just up ahead!” says Wraith, floating before the two.

From time to time, Wraith turns back around to see Lethi trying to talk to Tommy in broken Common, the human trying to figure out what the piglin is saying through the grunty pronunciation.

Lethi is one of the more outsider-friendly members of the Tribe and they’ve always had a soft spot for children, so it’s not a surprise that they are slowly chipping away at Tommy’s hesitation, with the younger even daring to correct a few phrases.

Finally, the tents peek into view, the carved wood and patterned cloth breaking through the red vegetation.

“Tommy, look!”

He stops his fruitless attempts to get Lethi to say “pogchamp” to face the Tribe, and his jaw falls open, eyes widening as he steps into the border of the town.

Wraith smiles at him, nostalgia flooding their mind. They face the Tribe, looking at the collection of structures with the eyes of their younger self, like the first time they’d reached this place.

Tents, big enough to allow five people to stand inside comfortably, dot the clearing in small clusters. The cloth they are made out of are works of art, the simple but sturdy weeping worm silk lovingly hand-painted by each of their occupants in unique designs.

Small piglin children run around chasing each other while dodging the adults going about their daily business, the soft grunts and squeals of their conversations creating a chaotic melody.

“Wha— How have I never seen this before?” asks Tommy, gaping at the fluttering settlement. “There are so many people here, what the hell!”

“It’s because they move every time someone untrusted finds this place,” explains Wraith, gesturing for Tommy to follow them deeper into the settlement, while Lethi drifts away from them and into the crowd. “Humans usually steal and kill everyone, so after Overworlders came here to the Nether, most Tribes decided they’d rather always move than die. Except for the Bastion Tribe, but they are a very stubborn exception.”

Tommy looks like he’s half-listening, looking at a pair of piglins as they unravel the silk from weeping worms floating in a barrel of water, chatting softly. The piglins stop as soon as they catch Tommy’s gaze, following him with their white eyes. More and more piglins cease talking, looking with distrust at Tommy, pausing in their tasks, rushing to get the children back inside. Wraith doesn’t blame them. The Tribe has survived this long by not trusting humans.

Tommy notices the hostile looks and steps closer to Wraith, nervously glancing around for exits, curling his hand in a way that means he’s very, *very* close to summoning his sword. Wraith wishes they could float faster.

Soon, Matee’s tent comes into view. Wraith recognizes it by the many colors that dot the fabric; most tents are made of red cloth with white bone dye gently tracing the drawings, but Matee’s has a few spots of bright blue and delicate purple and even the ever-rare black dye.

Just before the entrance, Wraith takes Tommy to the side and turns to him.

“Tommy, I need you to listen to me,” Wraith says, waiting until they’ve captured all of his attention. “*Please*, please don’t steal anything, don’t burn anything.”

His face falls, looking to the side like a toddler nearing a tantrum.

“I’m *serious*, Tommy,” Wraith pleads. “If you steal anything the Tribe would be in the whole right to execute you and exile me, please. Don’t make me lose my home.”

Tommy whips around to face Wraith, horror tinting his features at the word exile. “I won’t. I promise I won’t cause trouble,” he says, and Wraith almost cries with relief at the honesty in his words.

“You still have the necklace?” Wraith asks, nodding when Tommy points at the golden nugget on a string that he’s wearing around his neck. Wraith double-checks the golden bands around their short hair-tentacles. “Good, let’s go.”

Parting the flaps, Wraith gently steps inside. Matee sits cross-legged on the floor, scratching words into a piece of toughened leather with a sharp bone. Matee wears a leather tunic

covered in wide swatches by braided vines sewn into it, dozens of small colorful ribbons hanging from the vines. She even has two dark purple ribbons tied around her tusks.

Matee looks up from her task, her eyes widening when she sees Tommy. Wraith grimaces as she rises, Matee's tail swishing agitatedly behind her.

"Good hunting," Matee begins, ever the diplomat, closing her eyes and raising her chin in a formal piglin greeting. *"Now, could you explain who this is?"*

"This is Tommy, I saved him a week ago from lava," explains Wraith, struggling to hold their own against Matee's narrowed eyes. *"He... was hurt, the wounds far older and intentional than only lava. And yesterday the person who hurt him found us, so we ran."*

"And you would put the whole Tribe in danger for one lost human child?" parries Matee, sternly looking down at Wraith.

"Have I not proven my goodwill after all these years helping the Tribe?" answers Wraith, curling their fists. *"I refuse to give in to a person who would hurt a child so badly, and I have nowhere else to go."*

"Calm, Wraith," says Matee, her face softening, placing a hooved hand on their shoulder. *"I only needed to know that you were sure of your decision."*

"I am," Wraith says, the fight leaching out of them, letting their head dip down.

"You've grown so much," she quietly says, a small smile appearing on her lips, as Wraith looks up with wide eyes. *"Come on, the Tribe still has to decide. We shouldn't keep the child waiting,"* she says, gesturing with her head towards Tommy.

Wraith laughs softly, nodding.

"Wait, did she just call me a child?" asks Tommy, frowning.

"...What?" says Wraith, turning around to face Tommy. "Since when do you know Piglin?!?"

"I don't! My br— my friend taught me a bit years ago, so I can understand some but I can't really speak it. Hell, I can only say one word!"

"What word?" asks Wraith curiously.

"Fuck!" Tommy answers, a spark of mischief in his eyes.

Wraith's mouth opens and closes like a fish, before they instinctively facepalm. Heat rises over their cheeks, their paper-white skin turning a bright red with embarrassment. "Bloody lord, of course you remember that one."

Matee bursts out laughing, the matron of the Crimson Tribe doubling over with how hard she's snorting, her ears flapping about. Tommy laughs silently, his shoulders shaking, like he's trying very hard not to dissolve into giggles. Wraith groans loudly.

Finally, Matee's laughter subsides, wiping tears from the corner of her eyes. "*Oh dear, I haven't laughed this much in ages!*"

"*Yeah, he's... he's a spirited one,*" answers Wraith, smiling towards Tommy.

"*I'll call for a council,*" says Matee, straightening out their tunic and heading towards the way out. "*Stay in here until I call you both out.*"

"*Yes ma'am,*" responds Wraith, nodding.

Matee smiles and steps out the tent. Then, a sharp, loud squeal-like scream comes from outside the tent, making Tommy jump.

"What was *that*?" he says, flailing his hands in the direction of the door.

"That was Matee calling a council," explains Wraith, trying not to laugh at his startled expression.

"What the fuck? That sounded like she was being murdered!"

Wraith snorts, hiding their face in their hand when Tommy tries to glare at them.

"Alright, alright," says Wraith. "So, Matee's going to explain the situation to the whole Tribe, and then they're going to decide if we stay or not."

"Matee is the piglin that just went out, right?" asks Tommy. Wraith nods. "Is she the leader?"

"Not exactly," says Wraith, nervously adjusting the gold bands in their hair-tentacles. "Matee is the voice of the Tribe. It's like... she's in charge of solving conflicts, be it inside the Tribe or outside of it."

"So, like a judge?"

"No, not that either," answers Wraith, frowning as they search for the words to answer.

"Judges care more about finding who's guilty than solving the problem. And Matee also represents the Crimson Tribe before the other Piglin Tribes so she's also like an ambassador?"

"*Wraith, Tommy, please come forward.*"

Both Wraith and Tommy stiffen, looking outside. Wraith takes a deep breath while Tommy sinks his hands into the half-burnt green bandanna tied around his neck.

They step out into the clearing outside the tent to see a crowd of piglin standing around it, white eyes staring with curiosity at both of them. A single kid in the front row, one with a broken left tusk, waves at them cheerfully. Tommy waves back.

"*Wraith, please translate for Tommy,*" Matee says. Wraith nods.

“The Crimson Tribe, as a whole, has decided thusly,” begins Matee, holding out two ribbons, one red and one white, in her hands. *“On three conditions you will be allowed to stay.”*

“One,” she says, tying the two ribbons together with a knot. *“The human will follow all rules of the Tribe, including that which bars the showing the location of this village to anyone not connected to the tribe.”*

“Two,” she ties another knot. *“Tommy will be required to learn the piglin language, for as long as he stays.”*

“And three,” she ties the final knot. *“Wraith will be responsible for Tommy. Any crimes he commits will rest on their shoulders as well.”*

Wraith finishes translating only a second later, their throat dry. Matee reaches out, holding the ribbon in front of them.

“Will you agree to this promise?” asks Matee, her voice carrying loud and clear over the crowd.

“If you agree to the conditions,” says Wraith towards Tommy. *“Take one end of the ribbon and repeat after me. I promise.”*

“I promise,” says Tommy, his botched pronunciation earning him a few snorts of mirth from the audience.

“So it shall be,” declares Matee. Both Tommy and Wraith let go of the ribbon and Matee takes it, gently threading it through a gold hoop inside Matee’s ear and tying it so it dangles down.

Wraith gulps. Only very important promises get tied to the ears and not among the other myriad of promise ribbons. Lord, the only place more important than the ears are the tusks! The reality of what they have just done starts to sink into Wraith.

“So it shall be,” choruses the entire Tribe, the voices of almost four dozen piglin in a solemn harmony, and then they strike the ground with their feet producing the closest sound to a thunderstrike that can exist in the nether.

With that, the council is over and the crowd starts to disperse.

“Wraith!” says the familiar voice of Neethel, walking towards them. He’s clearly just finished work, black leather apron still over his bright red tunic, but the front pocket is empty of the usual assortment of medical supplies. *“By the Lady, I did not think you were going to grow attached to the Overworlder!”*

They splutter, trying to correct Neethel but not finding the words.

“Nevermind that!” he says, an impish smile on his face. *“Come on, I’ll help you set up your tent, you must be tired.”*

“ *Thank you Neethel,* ” answers Wraith, motioning for Tommy to follow.

“So where are we going?” asks Tommy, fiddling with his green bandana.

“We’re going near the medical tent,” says Wraith, pointing at a big, bright magenta tent a few ways over. “We’re settling beside Neethel’s tent. See the smaller purple tent beside it?”

“The one with the black wings drawn on it?”

“Yeah, that one. The spot to the right is the one I normally use,” answers Wraith.

Walking through the Tribe’s domain relaxes something in Wraith, and they smile, taking in the snippets of conversations as if it was a melody.

Soon they arrive at the spot and Neethel quickly enters his house to bring out a set of carved wooden posts and sticks them into the ground with a few mighty slams. Wraith reaches into their inventory to take out their tent cloth. It is stark white with red geometric designs at the edges, standing out simply by how much blank space it has. Tying the cloth down to the posts is second nature, even if the addition of Tommy helping replace the netherrack floor with quartz is a novelty.

“ *What is it with you and quartz?* ” asks Neethel, snorting at Wraith’s half-hearted attempt to hit him with a rope.

“ *It’s a pretty block and it helps with staying cool,* ” they explain, as if they haven’t had this exact same conversation many times before. “ *If anything, you should ask the same thing to Tommy but with cobblestone.* ”

“*What? No way,* ” Neethel says, glancing at Tommy with disbelieving eyes. “*I mean, it resists flame charges, but come on, it’s just so ugly!* ”

“Are you both shit-talking me?” says Tommy, glaring at them while brandishing his iron shovel, looking as intimidating as a newborn Hoglin.

“Maybe,” answers Wraith, tying the last post with a final tug. “You’ll have to learn enough piglin to find out.”

“You fucking bet I will, bitch,” he answers, smiling from ear to ear.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 5 pog!!! We finally get to meet the Crimson Tribe and introduce all these interesting concepts and I'm just :D.

I keep retconning stuff, mostly because I get new ideas. This is a new thing, writing without having the whole story planned. It’s **so weird** I am excited for that!!!!

That said, I read the bookmarks of this series and I smiled like an idiot when I saw KatieLion99 tag my story as "looking forward to updates", hope you enjoyed these updates!

And then I cackled out loud at chichinotfound's "dream go away" XD.

And Rudy-Rose-Heartbeat, I appreciate an organized bookmarker.

And finally: IkeaFries, here is what I had in mind for Tommy knowing the piglin language.

I'm happy you all enjoyed and I hope you see you guys next chapter :D

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Ranboo comes to in the middle of the snow, skin stinging like acid from the snow melting on his suit and holding a blaze rod for some enderdamned reason. He blinks, turning around to see an expanse of white broken only by a few spruce trees.

“What the *heck*,” he whispers, pocketing the blaze rod inside his inventory.

He reflexively rubs his hands on his forearms, more for comfort than actual cold. Wherever he must come from must be cold as hell if he’s fine in a suit in the middle of a tundra. The movement drags the soaked cloth over his skin, making him hiss in pain. His head hurts, the pain concentrated on his forehead. And maybe he fell on his back at some point because it is sore too.

‘What was I doing here?’ thinks Ranboo, digging in his inventory for his Memory Book.

He quickly skims over his lists (so he’s friends with Tommy now? That’s cool) and then flips over to the last page and begins to read.

Tommy’s gone missing. The place he was staying was blown up. I’m not completely sure, but I think Dream is behind this. DON’T TRUST DREAM.

Tubbo said Tommy is in the Nether. Search for him.

Days Tommy has been missing: IIII III

That tells him *nothing* of how he got here. He doesn’t even know where he is!

His ears go flat against his head, his tail lashing around. The urge to pick up a grass block is getting stronger and stronger, his claws gripping his notebook so tightly they leave marks in the leather.

He flips to the last page of the book, where he’s scrawled the coordinates of his house and types into his communicator so he can pull up his own coordinates. He’s... very far away.

Letting out a dismayed sigh, Ranboo resigns himself to a long trek in the snow.

Tommy sidesteps the trunk of a crimson shroom-tree, trying to pretend this is just a casual stroll through the forest. He listens for hooves or anybody following him, but all he hears is the swaying of red, vein-like branches and leaves.

He walks over to a patch of nylium-covered netherrack exactly three blocks from a quartz vein and quickly mines it, uncovering two barrels hidden inside.

The first barrel is full of odd bits and bobs; some netherrack blocks, multiple bottles of water, a single piece of leather, and a set of wooden tools. He shoves a few poorly-made bandages in there too before shutting the lid.

Tommy gags as he opens the lid of the other barrel, the smell of rotting food hitting his face. With an annoyed sigh, he dumps most of the contents out on the floor for the hoglins to feast on later and fills it up again with half his meal before tightly shutting the lid. He wishes it wasn't so hot in the Nether, everything spoils *so* fast.

A stick cracks behind him, and Tommy whirls around, iron sword at the ready. A zombie pigman looks at him with blank eyes, a golden sword loosely held in its grasp, before walking past.

"Yeah, run you fucking bitch," spits Tommy, trying to ignore the way his heart keeps pounding in his chest.

Hastily covering up the barrels, he heads back into the forest, trying to keep his pace slow through sheer force of will. Ghost eyes follow his every move, waiting for the right moment to strike, even though Tommy tells himself he has nothing to fear.

The tops of the tents come back into view and Tommy lets out a sharp sigh of relief, hurrying back to the village proper and letting himself get lost in the crowd.

Walking into the village, he catches the stares of a few piglin, but as days have passed he notices they become less and less. He can even recognize a few faces. Lethi the warrior, the one that was carrying a whole hoglin corpse without breaking a sweat, is a few tents down talking with one of his apprentices. An elder piglin that came in a few days back for some pain relievers shuffles down the street with a basket of mushrooms at his side. He can even spot the asshole that threw a handful of rotting meat at him the other day.

Said asshole catches his gaze and huffs, Tommy glaring at him in response. Asshole scratches the ground at him, which Tommy has learned is the piglin gesture for "you are an annoying fucker" before turning around and going back into his tent.

"Hardass," mutters Tommy, walking faster towards the bright magenta tent that serves as the village's hospital. "Not my fucking fault I didn't know that gapple was yours."

Soon, the healing tent comes into view. Tommy takes a second to look at the hundreds of red hoofprints painted on the fabric. Each of those hoofprints was left by a patient that was successfully healed, leaving behind their mark in gratitude.

Tommy parts the opening of the tent, standing back so that a piglin holding a baby in their arms can step out, before heading inside. He grunts a greeting to the piglins being treated inside and tilts his head respectfully to Onoe, the head healer, before walking past and into the storage area.

He parts the tent flap to enter the room, outfitted floor to ceiling with handmade chests in a deep red color, not the standard wood-brown of crafting-table chests.

Sitting on the floor, surrounded by ridiculous amounts of weeping-worm string and a small pile of wool, is Neethel. Neethel stuffs another roll of newly-made bandages into his black leather apron pocket, before looking up, his gold nose ring glinting in the low light.

“ *Hello!*” he greets, his ears fluttering happily, patting the cushion beside him.

Tommy says hello back, dropping himself onto the pillow and placing his crafting table in front of it. He grabs a handful of string before continuing the repetitive motions of turning that into wool.

“ *---- you ---- a good walk?*” says Neethel and Tommy cocks his head in confusion.

“ *Could you repeat that, please?*” says Tommy in Piglish, the phrase coming out perfect with the ease of constant repetition.

“*Did you ---- a good walk?*” answers Neethel slowly, digging into a new block of wool.

“ *Yes,*” answers Tommy, kind of sure that he’s talking about the walk he just had. Piglish is *weird* with how time is used. Verbs have different past forms depending on if what you’re talking about happened before you last slept, before the last reunion, before the last Council, or before your generation. And that’s it. There is no way of saying ‘last year’ or even ‘a few minutes ago’. It’s fucking trippy.

“ *Do you like walks?*” asks Neethel.

“ *I like walks a lot,*” answers Tommy, less because he means it and more so he can practice talking and not make an idiot of himself next time he tries to get his food.

“ *What do you do on walks?*” Neethel asks, his white eyes glinting with good-natured cheer.

Tommy’s shoulders rise sharply, every thought at the back of his head screaming that Neethel found his stash and he’s just asking to mock him before he’s forced to dump it all out.

He doesn’t understand why he feels like he’s doing something wrong, he’s not stealing anything! The food comes from his own portion, the leather, tools, and netherrack he got on his own. Even the bandages were poorly-made rejects that were going to be burnt, for Primes’ sake! Yes, he’s hiding stuff but they never said he couldn’t! He’s not doing anything wrong, shut the fuck up, brain!

He doesn’t answer, instead shoving string at the crafting table with more force than necessary.

Neethel shrugs but doesn’t press. Instead, he begins humming a chant under his breath. The words are in Galactic, not Piglish, since they’re a prayer to Lady Death, asking for her to spare the lives of his patients.

Taking his lead, Tommy starts reciting the only prayer he knows, a short psalm asking Prime for blessings of wealth. Normally he’d pray by ringing his bell while talking about the things he wants, but he doesn’t trust taking his bell out of the enderchest.

He's tempted to make up a prayer of his own. He's getting kind of sick of repeating the same words while he's stuck working odd jobs in the healing tent.

Neethel finishes his prayer and begins singing a children's rhyme that he's been trying to teach Tommy. It's a playful melody, just as rhythmic as all piglin songs. as if they were trying to play the drum with their voice.

It's a looping melody, so Tommy listens to Neethel sing until the end and then joins in. He fumbles the lyrics the first go-around, but when Neethel doesn't mention it, he just keeps singing. Both of them time their movements with their music, working until the singing becomes second nature.

And then Neethel changes the melody, doing a counterpoint to Tommy's own. It's something different every time, something he creates on the spot, and he doesn't understand a single word he says. It's still really cool.

The loop nears the end and Tommy thinks 'fuck it'. The song starts again, Neethel singing the original melody, and Tommy just starts babbling piglish-sounding nonsense, making his own counterpoint melody. It's sounds fucking horrible, but Tommy refuses to stop.

The song ends and Neethel starts waving his hands around and doing happy grunts, his ears flapping in excitement, his tail swinging around in glee. Tommy laughs at him but chokes on his laughter when Neethel hugs him.

He tenses, his breath getting caught in his throat. Neethel lets go as if he was burned, sounding apologetic.

Tommy's skin tingles as if it had been electrified, almost uncomfortable but not quite.

"*Are you okay?*" asks Neethel, cautiously reaching out to him.

He doesn't know where the impulse comes from, but Tommy lurches forward to hug Neethel back, ignoring the squeal of surprise that comes out of the piglin. After a few seconds, Neethel's arms come to wrap around his back and Tommy lets his head drop onto Neethel's shoulder, his own shoulders shaking.

He's horrified to find there are tears leaking out of his eyes, slowly dripping onto Neethel's magenta tunic, but the warmth that's trickling into his bones, a warmth that has nothing to do with temperature, is too much of a relief to let go.

He doesn't know how long he spends clutching Neethel, but eventually, he forces himself to let go and step back, sniffing and wiping his eyes with his hand. Neethel gently headbutts him, which makes Tommy chuckle and headbutt him back.

"Tommy? Are you there?" calls Wraith from the outside.

In a panic, Tommy wipes his face and tries to hide that he was just crying, just in time for Wraith to float into the storage room.

“There you are!” they say, grunting a greeting to Neethel. “It should be about time for a check-up, and after that, I’ve got your clothes!”

Tommy grumbles but stands up, his knees cracking loudly at the action. He follows Neethel through another tent flap at the back of the room and into the biggest room in the tent, that being the sick ward.

He drags his feet over to the weird-looking mess of weights and ropes that the Tribe uses as a weight scale and sits on a blackstone platform, patiently waiting as Neethel hooks weight after weight on the ropes until he feels the blackstone shift and slightly raise.

Neethel begins speaking rapid-fire piglish that Wraith translates as he talks.

“You still aren’t putting enough weight,” speaks Wraith, then frowns as they process the words as well. “Neethel is not sure if this is typical for humans, but your recovery is going much slower than expected. You’re eating all your portions, right?”

“Yeah,” immediately answers Tommy, a little too fast to be believable.

Neethel and Wraith share a look, an entire silent conversation unfolding between them that Tommy can’t even begin to understand. Memories of similar unspoken conversations between him and Tubbo flash in his mind, and he has to grit his teeth at the pain they bring. Even though the medical tent is just as full as it was before, Tommy feels as if he’s alone.

Wraith sighs. “Nevermind that. I have your clothes in my bag. I think one of the sickbeds is empty right now, maybe you could change there?”

Tommy nods, relieved. Piglins apparently don’t have any kind of taboo about being naked. When he went to get his measurements taken and the seamstress gave him some shirts to try on, he got so fucking freaked out when she started making motions for him to take off his clothes right there. He’s grateful that Wraith was there to explain the whole situation and that now they’re helping him find places to change.

He ducks into the small cubicle, the bed clean and empty of any patients, and hurries to shuck off the dress that Wraith lent him. Despite his best attempts to clean it each time he went to sleep, it’s already full of random stains and torn in multiple places.

First, he tries on the shirts. He has three. The first one is a plain red shirt, the silk coarser and thicker than the others. It’s a shirt meant for rough work, like going to mine. The other two he tried to get as close to his classic white-and-red shirt. One the seamstress made by sewing on the red sleeves, sturdy leather cording standing out in artful patterns over the silk. The last shirt was white and the top part was dyed by dunking it into a cauldron full of dye, so the red fades into white.

All three fit just fine, but Tommy’s not used to all his clothes looking different. Normally, people just get multiple of the same outfit, since that’s easier and cheaper to get done. Besides, changing your usual outfit has *meaning*. It means *you* have changed. Tommy looks at the clothes in his hands in frustration, wishing they looked just like his old shirt.

He shakes off those stupid, pointless thoughts and tries on the shorts he got along with a leather belt that has a gold buckle, a little like a piglin brute's. They look similar to his old pants at least since he still has them, even if they got absolutely trashed in exile and then turned into shorts by Wraith.

"What the fuck is up with the pockets? There's so many," says Tommy out loud, without meaning to.

"Mobs don't have inventories, Tommy," answers Wraith, startling him so bad he drops the belt on the floor.

"And they can't use a crafting table, yeah I fucking know," he snaps back.

Still, he hadn't really thought of not being able to use his inventory. Is that why so many piglins have pouches tied to their belts? Actually, he spots a leather hoop on his belt that would be perfect for hanging his sword with. Maybe pockets are pog.

The last thing he tries on is the shoes. They feel off in just the slightest way that's really fucking difficult to put into words, but it's better than he expected since piglin don't use shoes, their hooves more than strong enough to withstand the burning-hot netherrack. They're... good enough to keep his feet unhurt even if they're uncomfortable as hell.

He puts on his leather-stitched shirt and one of the shorts, stepping out of the cubicle. Neethel wiggles his ears in excited approbation, while Wraith critically looks at the clothes, most likely trying to figure out if they need adjustments.

Neethel starts poking Wraith's arm and says something to which they nod. "Neethel's asking if you want any jewelry. He'd be willing to lend you some."

"And uh," they continue awkwardly, "If you want some face paint I could lend you some too?"

"I don't want any fancy shit," answers Tommy, tilting his head towards Neethel. "And the paint..."

Tommy looks at Wraith. Today they have red paint outlining their eyes and dipping down their cheeks in what look like claw marks. It looks fucking pog, but Tommy knows he's a shit artist.

"Nah, no paint either," he finally answers, shoving his hands into the pockets of his shorts.

"Come on, Tommy. We should go eat," says Wraith, before switching to Piglish and saying the exact same phrase.

Tommy groans. He's not really hungry, at least not anymore, and he was enjoying speaking Common for the first time in... four days? Five?

"*What food do you like?*" asks Neethel in a voice so cheerful it grates on Tommy's nerves.

"Uuuuugh."

Vines curl around him in a warm hug, words of comfort filling his ears and lulling him into a doze.

“||J= J::L· ʒ==Ḥ† J ⇠JJṚ =::|L·J Ṛ, ʒ†L·!ḡ!||!”

Skeppy smiles, leaning more against the coarse shell of the Egg. The drips of crying obsidian fade into the background noise of his mind.

“ʒ==† |·J ʒḡ |ḡḡḡJJL·ḡḡ. ṚJ ||J= :.Jḡ† † J †L·!ḡ ·JL·, ʒ†L·!ḡ!||?”

“Yes!” he answers, closing his eyes so he can listen better to its voice. “Always.”

“⇠L·ḡ ·JL· ·JJ::L· =::|L·J Ṛʒ”

“I will,” he promises. “I will.”

Chapter End Notes

Translation of enchantment table language:

You are such a good friend, Skeppy!

But I'm still lonely. Do you want to help me, Skeppy

Get me more friends

Thank you, MayHijuga and Skylovesbooks! For reminding me I should have posted the translation here long ago. And another comment that I lost.

There is so much foreshadowing shoved into this one chapter. None of you have anyyyyyyyy idea.

I am slowly introducing all the moving parts of this story, but there we have a bit of slice-of-life with Tommy! And also I feel for him. Learning a language do be hard.

And now he's got a new outfit! I didn't even plan to translate skins into Overworld culture but now I did and I am so happy.

To clarify the timeline: Tommy spent roughly two months in exile, and then left. Dream noticed Tommy was missing three days later and told Tubbo the next day. On the fifth day, Dream found Wraith's house, and both Tommy and Wraith left for the Tribe that same day.

By the end of this chapter, Tommy has spent a week with the Tribe.

Also I really like the galactic alphabet. It's really pretty!

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Hello, my love,” she says. Her gentle hands cup his face and her eyes shine with quiet adoration. “I hoped by the time this came to be, you were already in my realm, but it seems fate has decided the matter for me.”

The void swirls around them with spiraling particles, slowly leeching the life out of his body. For a few moments in her presence, the pain is worth it.

“You have now become a player in a game of gods,” she says, her face becoming somber. “Listen and remember, love. A new god rises, hidden, in your world. Should you let it win, it will consume everything in its path.”

“Wake up, my love,” she says, and then Phil’s falling—

“Aaaaagh!” Tommy falls to the floor, quickly scrambling back as an axe slams on the ground before him.

“Enough for today,” says Lethi, hoisting the training axe back onto their shoulder.

“No! Don’t stop!” answers Tommy, scrambling back to his feet. He brings his own training axe forward, trying to hit the older warrior, but he misses spectacularly.

He tries to attack again, but he stumbles and has to stop, heaving for breath.

Lethi gingerly takes the wooden training axe from Tommy’s fingers and walks over to the weapons rack, setting it in its place.

“Not too much,” Lethi says, giving Tommy one of the many water bottles made just for him.

“I was better at fighting,” says Tommy, his voice cracking with an embarrassing chirp at the end.

“You were also eating more,” they say, nudging him towards the exit of the training area. “Be ---- with ----.”

“I didn’t understand that,” Tommy automatically answers, before opening the water bottle in his hand and taking a hearty gulp.

“...Give yourself time,” they say, putting a hand on his shoulder. “Rest. We will do more later.”

He nods and shuffles to the set of hard, packed cushions at the edge of the training area. He lets himself drop onto them and watches the other apprentices practice. Most of the other

apprentices are older than him and it shows, landing brutal blows on each other with efficient strokes of axes or lightning-quick sword strikes. Those using crossbows, despite piglin's shit vision, nail their targets dead-on and hit their opponents with the crossbow itself if they get too close. There are even a few weapons Tommy has never seen used before. There's one fighting with knives against someone wielding a damn *hammer* .

Tommy grits his teeth, looking down at the worn netherrack. He's better than this. He *knows* he can fight better than the pathetic attempts he's been making. What the fuck is wrong with him?

Lethi waves a hand in front of Tommy's face, snapping him out of his thoughts.

" *Can I sit?* " they ask, gesturing to the cushion beside Tommy.

He shrugs, drinking from his bottle while Lethi lowers themselves to the ground. Sitting right beside them, Tommy finds that while Lethi is more or less his height, he's dwarfed by their large frame.

" *Did you learn to fight from a piglin?* " Lethi asks, tilting his head towards him.

He hits the ground so hard his breath is knocked out of him. He tastes metal and warmth. His ears ring so hard he fears he'll never hear again. Techno looms over him, his fists bloody and grin feral.

"... *piglin hybrid*," Tommy answers, shaking the memories out of his head, forcing them back into a corner of his mind.

" *They were stronger than you, right?* "

"Oh fuck off! I'm the strongest man there is!" Tommy yells right in Lethi's face.

Their ears stand rigid in surprise, their gray eyes wide. " *I... — meant it as an —* "

" *Didn't understand.* "

" *I did not mean it as a bad thing,* " clarifies Lethi, their painted-red ears finally lowering into a relaxed state. " *I am strong, you are fast. But your teacher taught you to fight strong, not fast.* "

"Huh," Tommy says. "Wait, *my teacher was* ... oh, fuck, how do you even say that word. Uh, *my teacher was bad?* "

" *Maybe they were a bad teacher. I don't know,* " Lethi says. " *But I could teach you to fight fast.* "

" *You will?* " asks Tommy, trying to keep the hope out of his voice.

" *If you want,* " Lethi says, softly smiling.

" *Why?* " Tommy asks, narrowing his eyes at them.

“ Because I like teaching, ” answers Lethi as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Tommy opens his mouth, but then closes it with a click. He doesn't think that Lethi is lying and he already knows they don't hurt when teaching, not like Techno, so there is no reason to say no.

“ Sure, ” says Tommy, going for casually confident and ending up somewhere around cautiously excited.

“ Good. Follow me, ” Lethi says, getting to their feet, their tail swinging side to side. They trot over to the weapons rack, Tommy following behind, where they rummage around for a second before retrieving a wooden training spear.

“ Take it, ” they say, holding it out.

Tommy takes the spear, his hand curling around the wooden handle of it. He steps back and takes a test swing like he would do with a sword. He tries to do a cool twirl with it and ends up smacking himself in the face and dropping the spear to the ground.

Lethi walks over to Tommy, looking at him in concern, but calms down once he waves them off.

“ Start with your right hand palm up, ” says Lethi, picking up the spear from the ground and holding it out for Tommy to grab. *“ Your right hand is near the top, the left on the bottom. ”*

Tommy fumbles, but he soon does as he's told, holding the spear awkwardly before him.

“ Now, --- ---- ” Lethi says, coming back from the weapon rack holding a spear of their own.

“ What? ” Tommy says.

“ This, ” they say, stepping forward and doing a downward slash, the blade at the tip of the spear cutting through the air flawlessly. *“ A basic slash. ”*

He nods, breathing out before trying to imitate Lethi.

“ Good. Now do it twenty times. ”

Tommy stands back and repeats the motion. He knows this, grinding away at something, and soon his mind quiets. Learning how to use a spear... he surprisingly likes it. Even if it'll be difficult to keep using it because he can't craft one.

As he trains, without knowing it, he smiles for the longest he has in weeks.

“-ubbo. Tubbo!”

He startles, instinctively hiding his compass from view. “What? What's going on?”

“Could you focus for *once in your life*, Tubbo?” Quackity says, slamming his hand on the table. “Even Schlatt was more focused in meetings than you!”

Tubbo flinches, a pit of guilt opening in the bottom of his stomach. “Sorry.”

“As I was saying,” Quackity says, gesturing at Fundy for him to place their hit list on the table, the formal document set in a deceptively boring-looking folder. “We can’t keep waiting anymore. Technoblade is still somewhere out there, and he could decide to end our nation at any moment he fucking pleases.”

“I say we get ahead and hunt him *down*,” grins Quackity, his black eyes glinting with anticipation.

“Hear, hear!” says Fundy, his fangs shining through his smile.

“We still don’t know where he is, though,” points out Tubbo, frowning at the table.

“Then we force Philza to tell us,” Quackity says as if he was answering the question ‘what is 2+2’ and not implying *torture*.

“Absolutely not,” snaps Tubbo. “Philza is one of our citizens, we can’t do that.”

“He’s working with a known terrorist, Tubbo!”

“We don’t know that!” Tubbo sighs and drags a hand through his hair. “We can’t accuse him of collaborating with Techno without having proof it’s true!”

“We can find out?” says Fundy. “We can just— get in his house, see if we find anything?”

“You’re proposing we invade your grandfather’s house,” states Tubbo, a muted sort of disbelief in his tone.

“The first time I met him, he killed my father,” growls Fundy, sharp canines in full display. “He’ll *never* be my grandfather.”

“... Okay,” says Tubbo. He closes his eyes, lays his head on his hands. Quackity and Fundy won’t let go of the idea, and he’s sure that if he keeps saying no they’ll just do it behind his back anyway. And maybe if they do kill Technoblade, he won’t jump at shadowy corners and flashes of pink, he won’t wake up at night with nightmares of New L’Manburg in flames—

Wait. If they do find anything on Phil, they’ll probably imprison him. He won’t be able to search for Tommy anymore. Shit.

Think, Tubbo. *Think*.

If they have netherite gear, surprise him *and* fight him 4v1, they may be able to kill Techno. But if Phil takes his side, they’d be done for. So, he has to keep Phil out of the picture.

“Alright, here’s what we’re gonna do,” says Tubbo, putting on his most authoritative voice. “We’ll go to Phil’s house and search it while *he’s not there*,” emphasizes Tubbo, shooting a

glare at Quackity. “If there is evidence, we’ll capture him the next time he enters L’Manburg. If there isn’t, we’ll shelve plan Hog Hunt and focus on killing Dream, alright?”

“Fine,” huffs Quackity, rolling his eyes.

Tubbo breathes a sigh of relief. If they do find something, he’ll just send a message to Phil warning him to not come back, and hopefully, Phil can keep him updated on how his search for Tommy is going in return.

“Cool,” says Fundy. “Can I go now? I really wanna buy some scones from Nikki.”

“Sure,” says Quackity, standing up from his chair. “Tubbo, clean up the mess. I’ll go find us some supplies.”

Both Fundy and Quackity leave, and Tubbo is left alone in the meeting room. With an angry sigh, he begins collecting documents.

“ *Neethel, stop your tail,* ” says Tommy, standing up from beside the healer piglin, taking his plate with him. “ *It hit me again!* ”

Neethel laughs, almost letting bones slide out of his plate. His tail keeps whipping behind him as he playfully snorts.

Tommy strikes the ground with his foot in the pigling gesture for annoyance. Neethel loses the battle against laughter and falls to his side, the bone landing on the rocky ground.

“ *You fuck!* ”

“ *Bloody lord, you both are children,* ” says Wraith, putting their face in their hands.

“ *Only Tommy is a child!* ” gleefully says Neethel, leaning down to pick up his bone, cracking it in two.

“ *HEY!* ”

Neethel doesn’t answer, too busy sucking out the bone marrow out of his bone with a shit-eating grin on his face.

“ *Tommy, please sit down,* ” says Wraith, cracking a bone and putting it on his plate.

“ *Fineeee,* ” Tommy whines, pettily sitting as far from Neethel’s spot as he can. He takes the bone and sucks out the marrow. He was weirded out the first time he tried it, but now it’s quickly becoming one of his favorite foods. He already has a few more bones squirreled away in his inventory.

“ *We should go soon,* ” says Wraith to Neethel. “ *The healing tent needs more Ghast tears.* ”

Tommy screws his face up. Wraith, as a half-Ghast, makes Ghast tears when they cry. Neethel makes some sort of eye-watering brew and holds it near Wraith’s face, then collects

the tears, drying the water part and leaving the potion ingredient behind. It freaks Tommy the fuck out to see Wraith cry, even if they are doing it with a stony expression.

“ *I’ll go on a walk,* ” says Tommy, hurrying to finish his bone.

“ *Be back soon,* ” says Neethel, picking off a piece of mushroom from one of his tusks. “ *We need you to craft more things.* ”

Tommy groans. He’s been crafting so much shit the past few days. It gives him something to do during his mandatory rest time, but it’s so *boring* . Still, he once asked how they made bowls and it was hard to wrap his head around the fact that it took *hours* .

“ *Sure,* ” he says, subtly checking the food he has squirreled away in his pockets. “ *Be back soon.* ”

With Neethel and Wraith’s farewell’s at his back, Tommy makes his way out of the eating tent and wanders to the border of the town. He walks into the Crimson Forest, quieting his footsteps and keeping an ear out for any hoglin grunts.

The now-familiar path is deserted, and Tommy’s mind wanders to familiar wooden paths and the walls of his dirt hut. He wants to get back there... right? He loves his country, one of the last things he has from Wilbur, and he would give anything to go back to his bench and play his disks on the jukebox.

But he’s the cause of everyone’s problems since the start. It would probably be better if he never came back and stayed with the Crimson Tribe. Maybe if enough time passes, everyone will forget about him. It would be as if he was never there in the first place.

His feet stop in front of his hidden barrel, mining away the netherrack that covers it. This time there isn’t any rotting smell; he’s learned which foods last in the Nether. Granted he didn’t try to find lasting foods until he accidentally got drunk off of some melon juice he had hidden away for a little too long. He shuts the barrel with a wooden clack.

“Hello, Tommy.”

The familiar voice freezes the air in his lungs and Tommy turns around. Standing before him is a familiar man in a white mask, the blank smile pointed in his direction.

On instinct, Tommy summons his sword, the dull iron looking as menacing as a toothpick against the gleaming netherite of Dream’s armor.

“Why are you doing this?” Dream asks, his voice pained, taking a step towards Tommy. “I’ve been looking for you for *weeks*, Tommy. Do you know how worried I was when I came back to apologize for losing my temper and you were gone?”

He knows that Dream’s faking, he fucking *knows* that he’s only there to watch him, but he battles the guilt that rises at how honest Dream’s voice sounds. Tommy’s sword lowers without his input, but Tommy shakes his head and raises it again.

“Tommy, please, you can’t keep doing this!” says Dream, throwing his hands up in the air in exasperation, ignoring the full-body flinch Tommy does. He reaches into his inventory and Tommy’s comm materializes in his hand. The message ‘go away Dream’ in bright red letters shines from the broken screen, exactly as Tommy had left it in Wraith’s house. “I waited for you to come back on your own, I even gave you back your comm , but instead you stay with a bunch of mobs and spit on everything I’ve done for you!”

“They’re better friends than you are!” spits back Tommy, a spark of anger lighting in his chest. “They don’t hurt me or blow up my stuff!”

Dream sighs as if he’s explaining a basic concept to a particularly stupid child. “I am trying to help you! You keep doing shit like this, *of course* I need to teach you how to be a decent human being!”

“I’m not going back with you,” says Tommy, gripping his sword tightly. “I’m staying here.”

“...fine,” spits Dream, his voice cold and cutting. “Fine! Stay here and keep lying to yourself!”

“What?” asks Tommy, stepping back.

“They don’t care about you, Tommy! Why can’t you see that?!?” Dream says, harshly running a hand through his hair in annoyance. “They’re just letting you hang around, they don’t give a *shit* about how you are!”

“You’re lying!” screams Tommy, but deep down there’s a voice agreeing with what Dream’s saying. “Leave me the fuck alone you shitty-ass liar!”

“The only one lying here is *you* to *yourself*,” answers Dream, stepping even closer to Tommy. “If you don’t believe me, call out to them!” he says, pointing towards the village with a sweeping gesture of his arm. “Ask for help, see if they care!”

Tommy hesitates, looking towards the Crimson Forest obscuring the village. It’s not far, his voice would reach fine, but he doesn’t want to know. He doesn’t! Let him pretend a little longer, please—

Dream summons his axe and swings towards him, knocking the sword out of his grasp. Tommy flinches and throws himself backward, his back hitting the wall with a flash of eye-watering pain. The blade of the axe is held at his throat, the sharp edge pressed against his skin with a cold promise.

“CALL!”

“WRAITH!” screams Tommy, tears gathering at the edge of his eyes. “WRAITH HELP! NEETHEL! LETHI, *ANYONE, PLEASE! HELP!* ”

The axe presses harder, Dream cocking his head to the side as the blade draws a thin line of blood.

“ *HELP, PLEASE!*” screams Tommy, the Piglish words shredding his vocal cords, his eyes darting around in a frenzy for an escape. “ *HELP ME!*”

The sounds of the Nether fill Tommy’s ears, the faint echoes of grunts and squeals of the Tribe reaching him, but there’s no movement, just red roots and towering stems.

“...Looks like nobody came,” casually remarks Dream, taking away his axe.

Tommy falls to the ground, soundless, stuttering gasps ripping out his throat. His tears finally fall, hitting the ground and slowly begin to evaporate. He curls himself into a tight ball, a sob bursting from his chest.

“Oh come on, don’t tell me you actually thought they’d come,” mocks Dream, a tea-kettle laugh wheezing from his chest. “I thought you were smarter than that!”

He doesn’t answer, instead digging his nails into his scalp, trying to ground himself over the crushing hopelessness rising against him.

“See, Tommy?” Dream says, almost softly, running a hand through Tommy’s hair. “I’m the only one who cares about you.”

Tommy shudders, the touch a burning parody of Wilbur’s affectionate head ruffles and Phil’s gentle strokes that he can’t help but lean into.

“Hey,” Dream says softly, placing a hand on Tommy’s shoulder. “We should go back to Logstedshire. We can go build a cobblestone tower, how does that sound?”

He closes his eyes, too *tired* to even try and hide his tears anymore. Hanging his head, he exhales with a shudder.

“C’mon, get up,” orders Dream, but Tommy’s shaking legs refuse to cooperate. “I *said* get up—”

“Who are you?”

Standing on the edge of the clearing is Wraith, eyes narrowed at Dream, one hand inside their leather pouch.

“I’m his friend,” says Dream, tilting his head towards Tommy, but two months in Logstedshire taught Tommy about the dangerous line of tension running in Dream’s shoulders. “I’ve come to take him back home.”

Wraith hesitates, but then takes one look at Tommy’s tear-stricken face and their expression hardens. “Step away from him.”

“I’m afraid I won’t be doing that,” answers Dream, a quiet, drawled statement of the truth. His gleaming netherite axe materializes in his hand.

“ *Get down!*” they yell in Piglish and Tommy throws himself to the floor just in time for a fireball to burst out of their mouth with an ear-rending shriek, careening straight towards

Dream.

He throws himself to the side, barely dodging the flaming ball. The projectile keeps going and hits a Crimson Shroom, obliterating it on the spot.

Tommy scrambles to his feet, gripping the netherrack wall as a support, as Dreams runs towards Wraith. They throw a slowness potion right at Dream's face, but he dodges and only barely gets splashed. His movements slow but he still keeps going.

Panic takes over Wraith's face and they start floating upwards, quickly going out of Dream's range. He instead summons his bow and fires point-blank. The arrow sinks into Wraith's thigh and they shriek in pain, letting loose another fireball that Dream blocks with his shield, quickly notching another arrow.

With cold electricity flowing down his spine, Tommy realizes that Wraith is *not* a fighter. They don't have the practiced instincts that come from war, flinching when they should keep going, fumbling when they should press what little advantage they have.

So Tommy does what he's always done and grits his teeth until his grimace looks like a smile, grips his sword tighter and jumps into the fight.

He goes for a cheap shot, slashing at Dream's back, but he notices and resummons his shield, the sword clanging uselessly against it. Dream rams Tommy backwards with the shield and turns to strike, setting Tommy on the defensive.

He tries to parry but his arms shake from the effort so he jumps to the side and tries to do a reckless strike that Dream flawlessly side steps, who then surges forward, scoring a deep gash into Tommy's side.

Tommy curses, pressing a hand against the wound to stem the bleeding, and then watches with horror as Dream fires an arrow point-blank into Wraith's neck.

Wraith *screams*, their levitation cutting out and making them plummet to the ground. They hit the netherrack with a sickening thump- *crack!* and skid to a stop. With a choked cry, Wraith tries to prop themselves up against a rock, but their arms fail them and they collapse back down.

"No! Wraith!" Tommy screams, watching as Dream walks over towards them, posture loose, his axe swinging carelessly.

"You get attached so easily Tommy," Dream says, sticking his foot just under Wraith's chin, forcing it up. "I thought you'd learn not to by now."

The words sink to Tommy's brain like a needle, making his ears ring. *No*, he thinks, *not again*. He bursts forward with a wild yell, praying to Prime for just *one* miracle. One way to keep the friend he still has.

He charges at him, and Tommy can almost *feel* Dream rolling his eyes behind the mask, ready to stop his desperate swing in his tracks.

He strikes.

Tommy watches as if underwater the moment Dream's annoyance turns into shock as the sword in Tommy's hand is swapped by a spear, the bladed tip burying itself deep into Dream's stomach.

He stumbles backwards, clutching at the gushing wound, summoning a health potion from his inventory and downing it in one go. The wound closes enough to stop bleeding, but it's obvious that any movement will open it right back up.

"Is this how you wanna play it, Tommy?" says Dream, his voice a steady note of calm before the storm. "IS THIS HOW YOU WANT THINGS TO GO?!?"

Tommy flinches away, drops of blood splattering on the ground from his spear.

"I WILL NEVER GIVE UP ON YOU, YOU HEAR ME TOMMY?!?" Dream screams, swinging at Tommy who barely dodges and tumbles to the ground. "I'LL ALWAYS BE RIGHT BEHIND YOU UNTIL YOU REALIZE HOW MUCH OF A MISTAKE YOU'VE MADE!"

Dream jumps away from Tommy, a spiked metal ball flying through the space his head was in milliseconds before. The metal ball is pulled back by a chain, coming to rest beside cloven feet.

"*Get out,*" growls Neethel, the length of a chain on one hand and a mace held tightly in the other. Behind him there are more piglin, all wielding weapons, huffing angrily at Dream.

The white porcelain mask betrays none of Dream's thoughts as he observes the horde of angry piglin pointing weapons at him.

"Oh well," Dream says, casually beginning to type into his communicator. "I guess we're doing this the hard way."

Tommy opens his mouth to ask what the hell he meant when the unmistakable explosions of TNT go off in the distance. With mounting horror, Tommy watches as a section of the roof above the village breaks away, stone and red dust showering the tents, before a *river* of lava begins flowing from the high point *directly on top of it*.

"Your problem now," Dream says before smashing an invisibility potion and running away, his laughter the only thing he leaves behind.

Chapter End Notes

Writing a character that's still learning a language is so fucking complicated and yet this is the **fourth** time I've written a story where this is the case. Why the hell am I so masochistic???

Also about piglin weapons: piglin can't craft, so why the hell would they stick to the normal boring weapons of sword and axe? Those are only used for hunting, not true combat. Tommy's weapon is actually closer to a naginata than a spear, but he wouldn't know that.

Poor Fundy. He's hurting and nobody notices ;-;

And the green bastard has finally made an appearance and fucked things up like always! The puppeteer has put many strings in motion and the village is going to be on fire, oh no! :)

Fun fact, I accidentally sent this line “See, Tommy?” Dream says, almost softly, running a hand through Tommy’s hair. “I’m the only one who cares about you” to the class group chat without context. I swore I was going to die of embarrassment.

Anyways, comments are my lifeblood and every single time I get one I do a happy wiggle dance and grin like an idiot. Hope you guys enjoyed and until next time!

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Images swim in front of Tommy's vision. It isn't the Crimson Tribe he's seeing, but L'Manburg going up in flames, explosions echoing in the distance as more and more ground crumbles. The splash and strong, syrupy melon taste of a healing potion reach through his hazy mind, forcing him back to the present as the burning itch of healing skin envelops his wounds.

Wraith downs a potion of regeneration themselves, slowly rising up from the ground as they yank the arrow out of their throat, splashing a potion of instant health on the wound.

“ *GET TO THE VILLAGE!*” orders Lethi, just as Wraith throws multiple potions of fire resistance at everyone present.

“ *Tommy, get to the northernmost corner of the village ,*” says Wraith, digging into their leather satchel and pulling out even more bottles of fire resistance and passing them to him. “ *Throw these at anyone who needs them, but get to safety quick!*”

Wraith waits until Tommy nods his agreement before they down a potion of swiftness and set off towards the village, their floating speed a potion-induced sprint.

Tommy doesn't think twice before running towards the village. Screams reach his ears as he stumbles near the first tents. He finds a trio of piglin desperately trying to take down their tent before the lava reaches it, and Tommy throws the splash potion at them.

He waits to see the glass break, making sure all three are protected before he notices a piglin child and he runs off, barely hearing the thanks of the three piglin.

“ *Are you okay?*” asks Tommy at the panicked child, who immediately clings to his leg and starts sniffing.

Tommy acts on instincts born of helping raise Fundy and picks the kid up in one arm. He tucks him close to his chest and carefully cracks a potion over him, watching as the orange shimmering swirls rise from his skin.

A horrifying shriek breaks through Tommy's focus, and he catches a piglin collapse to the ground, flames engulfing their form. They roll on the netherrack before the screams cut out, laying there motionless. During an infinite second, Tommy waits for the body to disappear in a puff of smoke. Instead, it stays.

Mobs don't have three lives, Phil's voice says in his mind. They only get one. It's what makes us different from them.

Bile rises in Tommy's throat, but the child in his arms lets out a quizzical grunt and Tommy turns away from the body, blocking it from the kid's view. "Fuck," he quietly curses, getting to his feet and running towards where Wraith told him to go.

He moves on autopilot, throwing potion after potion at whoever moves, his vision blurring at the edges from the smoke. He gags as he passes a tent on fire, the smell of burned pork making his stomach churn.

Reaching the clearing at the north of the village, he sees the dozens and dozens of piglins all grouped together, Neethel and the Head Healer frantically flitting around, helping as many as they can even through the desperate shouts of piglins trying to find where their loved ones are.

Tommy sets the child down, running towards Neethel.

"*Where's Wraith?!?*" Tommy asks, watching as he tends a bleeding gash on a young-looking piglin biting into a piece of leather.

"*Look up!*" is the only thing that Neethel says, taking a hot iron rod and pressing it into the wound, cauterizing it despite the piglin's leather-muffled screams.

He looks up to the dripping ceiling, watching as more and more lava slips through widening cracks, finally catching the white figure of Wraith trying to patch up the holes in the ceiling before it gives way even more.

Tommy could stay with the rest of the village, stay safe and far away from the burning, wait until Wraith returns. His feet are moving before his mind catches up to him.

He runs as close as he can to the flowing lava, gritting his teeth at the drops of burning liquid falling from the ceiling, and summons netherrack from his inventory, towering up as fast as he can.

He keeps his eyes on the ceiling as he jumps, the chunks of rock appearing under his feet at his command. Dust gets into his eyes, but he blinks the tears away and reaches the ceiling, placing netherrack and watching as it magically welds itself with the already-existing rocks.

His throat *burns* every time he swallows, the heat wrapping around him like a straightjacket but he fights it. He's fucking *done* with seeing his home houses get destroyed over and over again.

"*What are you doing here?!?*" screeches Wraith, a Ghast-like shriek leaving their mouth as they float towards him. "*I told you to go to the clearing!*"

"*I went there!*" screams Tommy back, jumping to place another block, before abandoning Piglish to scream "And fuck you bitch I am not going back!"

Wraith releases a wordless screech of frustration before they throw a stack of blocks at Tommy. "Do you still have fire res?"

“Yes,” answers Tommy, focusing on the particles floating from his skin, calculating he has at least two more minutes before the potion runs out. He has two more splash potions, and that’s it.

“I’ll do the south side, you do the north side and for the love of the Blood God, please don’t get hurt,” says Wraith, Tommy straining to hear them over the constant tinnitus in his ears after Logstedshire.

Tommy nods and taking a deep breath, he jumps into the lava.

For a split second, he’s drowning, the burning in his throat tasting salty as the lava dissolves in front of him into the shimmer of water.

Tommy inhales lava by accident and the bizarre taste and unnatural heat snap him out of the memory, forcing him to lean his face out of the current of lava to cough and splutter, barely swimming against the current. He reaches a handhold through the burning sludge and he waits until he can take a deep breath again and plunge back inside. He swims into the lava, forcing his eyes open despite the light being far too bright, and finds the edges of the cracks. He works, his three stacks of netherrack slowly dwindling as he places block after block, taking greedy breaths of air in between before plunging back down.

His blocks run out far too soon. He surfaces for the last time, looking down to the village. The tents are smoldering, the flames snuffed out by the fire-resistant cloth without the lava to keep them going, but he can count at least a third of the village’s tents as unsalvageable.

The world starts to spin, finally being conscious of the tightness in his chest. He coughs and he can taste smoke on his tongue. Inhaling smoke is dangerous; that’s a lesson Sapnap’s burning of the L’Manbergian forest taught them and Tommy yanks his own hair as a punishment for his own stupidity.

It’s getting more and more difficult to breathe, to keep kicking against the current, so instead, he lets himself flow down, trying to get as far from the smoke as he can but gray engulfs his vision.

He barely feels it when he hits the ground, lava flowing around him before the darkness swallows him whole.

Dream punches the obsidian frame of the nether portal, spitting a litany of Ender curses. He resists the itching of the healing potion as it knits his skin back together, holding the glass so hard it cracks.

He had been *sure* the piglins wouldn’t come to Tommy’s aid. In none of his *centuries* of life had a piglin tribe ever let an outsider be anything more than a passing ally, but somehow Tommy motherfucking Innit had managed to get them to take arms for him.

What the hell does that child have that makes people follow him? Wilbur’s charisma was something he wielded like a weapon even as his sanity shriveled to nothing. But Tommy got

people to like him through a personality as abrasive as sandpaper and as annoying as a mosquito in your ear.

And he had been so close! So close to breaking Tommy and keeping him under his control, but he got too invested in the game. *Damn* his hubris and obsessions.

“ Are you mad ?”

Dream turns around to face the grinning mask of his patron god, Exdeh. The thousands of shimmering, firefly-like wings that wrap around him flutter in amusement, breaking the illusion of being a cloak.

“Fuck. Off,” he spits, his annoyance rising as the grinning mouth on the deity’s mask grins wider.

“ Oh come on, Dreamy !” the deity teases, teleporting to hover over Dream’s shoulder. **“ You should be happier; you found Tommy after all! ”**

“You knew this would happen, didn’t you,” growls Dream, Exdeh’s laugh grating to his ears. “You knew that they’d fight for him!”

“ Of course I did, ” Exdeh says, the smile widening so much it reaches the eyes. **“ It made things so much more fun!”**

“You’re ruining my plans!” he screams, gripping a hand through his hair. It’s not the first time Dream wants to murder a god, but it sure is the one he’s come the closest to actually trying to. “You— you fucking—”

The eyes of the mask open vertically, the Ender eyes focusing on him with slit pupils, and Dream shuts his mouth with a click. The sparks of divinity in his veins turn to acid and he bows his head, gritting his teeth.

“ The past you would be laughing at this, ” hisses Exdeh, cocking his head past what would be possible in a human’s. **“ Remember your oath, my Champion. ”**

Dream nods, swallowing back the taste of endstone dust and dragon’s breath.

“ I’ll leave you alone then! ” says Exdeh, merrily bouncing up and down, doing a *ridiculous* jig, before disappearing in a burst of ender sparks.

“... Remember my oath,” Dream mumbles, furrowing his brow as he thinks back to the moment he swore himself to his god. And then it strikes, his eyes widening as he tenses as if electrocuted. “No.”

He’d grown complacent, forgetting his duties and getting stuck in his games as the years passed and nothing happened. And now time has snuck up on him, unprepared and stumbling blind. How much of an *idiot* is he?

Fuck his plans. He doesn’t have time for games anymore.

Wraith fights their tiredness as they float alongside the Tribe, holding an unconscious Tommy in their arms.

The Crimson Tribe walks in solemn silence, some holding children in their arms, others holding corpses. The tents that could be salvaged are slung on their backs, moving as one through the red, towering fungus.

The wheezing, stuttering breaths that rattle from Tommy's chest squeeze Wraith's heart at every turn, mentally repeating to themselves that he's fine, that the potion should be doing its job. He isn't going to die. The Tribe survived. They aren't going to die, nobody's going to die, not again—

Their mind retreats from their body, the tiredness dissipating into the emptiness that invades them.

A sharp call comes from the front of the march and everyone stops. Wraith blinks back tears of relief as they lay Tommy down onto the ground, retrieving their tent from their inventory and setting it up hastily. The Tribe will only stay there to sleep. Piglish murmurs begin rising, but only ever become a soft screen of background noise, like the pitter-patter of rain on the ground.

Wraith lays Tommy on his bed, absentmindedly stroking his hair as he fitfully sleeps, not truly registering the sensation. But even that becomes too much effort to coordinate the movements, their hand's movements becoming clumsy, like a puppet with tangled strings.

Eventually, they give up. Time passes by without thought as they watch Tommy's chest rise and fall, rise and fall, rise and fall, rise and—

Tommy's eyes crack open.

"Wraith?" he says, trying to stand up, his voice a painful croak. "What happened?" He tries to stand up, but he sways and collapses back down.

"...Wraith?" he says, looking into their face with a worried frown. "...You're spectating, aren't you."

With effort, they move their hand to one of their tentacles and dig their nails into it hard enough to draw blood. The pain is a focal point, one they grab desperately to get back into their body long enough to calm Tommy down.

"Yes," Wraith answers the words ill-fitting in their mouth.

"What happened to the village?" he asks, reaching into his inventory for a bottle of water, uncorking it, and slowly sips, wincing every time he swallows.

"Moving," answers Wraith, digging harder into their tentacle. Tommy glances at the blood slowly dripping from Wraith's fingers, but he doesn't say anything. "We stopped to sleep."

"...Why is it so quiet," Tommy asks a note of terror tinging his voice.

“Funerals. They’ve all gone to do funerals,” mumbles Wraith, tiredness mixing with the haze of spectating pulling them even farther away. “Only members of the Tribe are allowed in the funerals.”

“And we aren’t part of it,” answers Tommy with a kind of resigned bitterness Wraith has only ever heard in their own voice.

Wraith summons their own bed and places it beside Tommy’s, collapsing onto it without a word. They don’t know how much time passes, their head foggy and swirling with static, but at some point, they feel the warmth of Tommy’s back pressing against theirs. The heat sinks into their bones, chasing away a chill Wraith didn’t even know was there in the first place.

With silent tears streaming down their face, Wraith drifts off to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

I am soooooo tired. I shouldn't be awake rn but I told myself I had to finish this chapter today so here you fellas go. One steaming-hot shitshow coming up, with plenty of trauma on the side!

That said, Dream better get his shit together.

I love you guys' comments and little notes on the bookmarks, by the way. I read 'em all. And if you bookmark this story, chances are I'll probably search for fics through *your* bookmarks! I've found more than a few rare gems this way.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

WARNING! There is a suicide attempt in this chapter. If you want to skip it, it starts at "Wraith nods. Goes back to eating." and ends with the linebreak. Quick summary: Tommy attempts to jump into the lava again, but Neethel convinces him to wait until after the Tribe has a council to decide what to do.

The halls are dark and empty as Skeppy walks through them, running a blood-red hand against the wall, leaving an almost imperceptible red sheen behind.

His footsteps clang brokenly as he walks by, and he vaguely recalls a time where they would clink against the ground like crystal, like the diamond he is. Or he was, he guesses. Blood-red diamonds don't exist, do they?

The thought is swept away with a gentle whisper, the crimson blooms growing out of the cracks in his body singing assurances and comfort, guiding his footsteps forward.

He reaches a door, gently cracking it open. His eyes are directed towards the figure in the bed, buried under blue blankets. With soft steps, Skeppy enters the room.

His soon-to-be friend sleeps deeply, not waking up even when Skeppy shakes him, but that's okay. His expression is pinched, not peaceful, so Skeppy guesses they need the rest. That's okay, Skeppy thinks, plucking one of his flowers and winding it around his wrist as a friendship bracelet.

With that done, Skeppy gets out of the room and walks along the hallway, reaching another room. The blooms in him dance as the heat and heartbeat of another soon-to-be friend comes closer and closer, drawing Skeppy in the right direction.

When he opens the door he finds orange sheets and another sleeping person and he draws closer.

He stops.

The peacefully sleeping face, framed by unruly dark hair, draws emotions closer to the surface. He... cares for this person. That is surprising, Skeppy muses. He hasn't cared about anything else but the Egg since—

A resounding crack echoes through the room and Skeppy forgets what he was thinking about, a soft ache starting at the back of his skull. The sleeping person wakes up.

"...Pops? What are you doing here?" the person— Sapnap, that's Sapnap, no he can't be here no— the person says, his bleary eyes casting a slight orange glow in the darkness. "And how did you even find this place?"

"Here," answers Skeppy, pulling another flower from himself, carefully winding it around the sleep— his son! That's his and Bad's son he can't do this to— winding it around the knot in the sleeping person's bandanna. "A gift."

"Thank you I guess?" grumbles the person, squinting at Skeppy's face. "What—"

"Sleep," answers Skeppy, turning around. "Goodbye."

"Bye..." the person says, a weirded-out tone in his voice, but he still turns around and buries himself back into the bedsheets.

Once he's out of the room, the slight ache in his skull draws his attention once more. He places a hand on it, and it comes back red with blood, small bits of roots swimming in it.

Oblivious to the slight trail of blood he's leaving behind, Skeppy heads to the exit to the outside, in search of more friends.

The Tribe moves through the Crimson Forest, the air slowly filling with the clip-clop of the piglin's hooves as the nylum thins out to be replaced with hard netherrack.

"Wraith?" Tommy whispers, glancing at the silent piglin surrounding them. "When are we going to stop?"

They don't react, their gaze far away and unfocused. Tommy grimaces as they realize Wraith is spectating, their mind far away, and he has no idea how long it'll take for them to get back.

He searches for Neethel with his gaze, finds him whispering something to another piglin while re-wrapping an injury, motions confident and practiced despite being on the move. Lethi is towards the front, carrying an elder on his back.

For the first time since he stayed with the Tribe, he's painfully aware he's still in exile. Even surrounded by people, the loneliness crawls along his veins and makes his hands shake.

He's suddenly, deliriously sure they're going to kick him out again. As soon as they've walked enough to feel safe from Dream, they're going to kick him out. Because he's the one that led Dream to them. *He's* the reason so many of them died. The one fucking rule they gave him was to not let *anyone* find out where the Tribe was, and he couldn't even do that.

Dream might be a bastard but he was right. Tommy's just a fuck-up that doesn't know how to behave.

In the back of his mind, he'd been aware that the glow of lava had been slowly but surely getting brighter as the Crimson Forest got thinner and thinner. But now the knowledge that there is lava nearby, warm, comforting, *deadly* lava screams at him.

He forms a plan in his mind, as unsubtle and reckless as most of his plans, and he can breathe again. He'll— he'll be free. He just has to hold on until then.

Suddenly the blisters on his feet don't feel so bad anymore. He even musters the courage to take Wraith's hand, a soft smile on his face, as he pretends the limp fingers are Tubbo's.

He doesn't know how long it takes for the Head Healer to call for a rest, just that he almost bumps into the back of whoever's walking in front of him. Taking the tent off of Wraith's shoulders and unrolling it while Wraith begins digging in the main supports is second nature at this point. It's... peaceful. He doesn't hate this kind of silence anymore.

But, as soon as Wraith settles down to eat, Tommy shakes his head with a shaky smile. “ *I'm gonna go for a walk.* ”

Wraith nods. Goes back to eating.

Tommy at first tries to go at a casual pace, passing by the trees, but as soon as he's hidden by them he breaks into a sprint. The glow of the lava gets brighter until he skids to a stop.

Below him, a sea of blinding heat stretches far past the horizon, currents of hot air rising and tinting the air with mirages. Nether fog covers the edges of the terrain, turning the sharp edges soft and indistinct as if he was dreaming.

He stares mesmerized at the shifting colors of the liquid below him. He's always liked fire, perhaps a bit too much. He'd liked staring at the shapes it made, liked playing chicken with it, testing how close he could get before it burned.

His memories of it are tainted though. With Sapnap burning the forest around L'Manburg, and Wilbur putting out his cigarettes on Tommy's arms if he said he shouldn't smoke, and the fires that consumed his nation after the explosions, and the way Dream would sometimes use Fire Aspect on him—

Tommy shakes his head. He doesn't want to remember that. He... he wants to be like Ghostbur. Wilbur died with a smile on his face, right? And he only remembers the good things. So if Tommy does the same...

He smiles, softly, tiredly, at the lava. They've ruined fire for him, but lava's still fine. Lava's still his. And he gets not only to spite Dream, but do something good for once in his life. With him gone, Dream won't have any reason to go after the Tribe or L'Manburg. No more fights. No more deaths. No more Tommy.

Tommy spreads his arms, imagines he's flying.

“ *Can I sit with you?* ”

Tommy's eyes burst open, almost flinching off the edge, but he catches his footing at the last second.

Standing beside him is Neethel, his smile easy and posture loose.

He gapes, nods practically on automatic. Neethel just plops himself down beside where Tommy's standing, patting at the ground to signal that he should sit too.

"It's fine, I won't stop you from jumping," says Neethel casually, kicking his legs over the magma like a little kid. *"Can we talk a little before you jump?"*

Tommy's really fucking confused. Is he hallucinating? Fuck, he'd thought the hallucinations went away when he left Logstedshire, what the hell.

Still, hallucination or not, Tommy sits down beside him.

"Jerky?" asks Neethel, holding a little bundle of tied-together meat. *"I know you didn't eat."*

He reaches out, taking the food gingerly before taking a bite just to be polite. The meat feels too real to be a hallucination, so at least he knows he's not going crazy. Still, he has more questions than answers.

"You know, I really don't want you to die," says Neethel, taking a bite of his own food. *"You're a cool kid."*

"Not a kid," mumbles Tommy, swallowing down his meal.

"Cool person, then," he corrects. *"You're funny as hell and you're a riot to be around. I'll miss ya if you go."*

"... Really?" says Tommy in a small, wavering voice. *"You mean it?"*

"Of course," he says, a fond smile on his face. *"I'm sure Wraith would too. And Lethi! I swear by her dark wings that Lethi would take you as his main apprentice the second you asked."*

"Neethel, don't— don't lie to me," says Tommy, hating how a waver enters his voice. *"Don't say—"* he wants to say bullshit, but he doesn't know the word in Piglish— *"stupid stuff to get me to stay."*

"I'm not," says Neethel, a look of surprise on his face, as if he hadn't even thought about doing that. *"If you chose to go to the arms of Lady Death, it is not my place to stop you. But..."* he takes a deep breath, looking at the lava with a trace of grief in his eyes. *"We all meet her in the end. I'd love to spend more time with you before you go."*

Tommy can't stop his eyes from watering, his throat tight with unsaid words. But one thing he's aware of: he's wanted. Neethel... Neethel said he doesn't want him to die. That he likes being around him. He doesn't have to be alone. But—

"I can't stay," says Tommy, his fists tightening painfully as he fights the tremor in his voice.

"You can, though. At least for a while. When we arrive, they're calling a council to decide what to do next," informs Neethel. *"You know, you could stay with us until the council and then find out how things go from there?"*

Neethel smiles softly, extending a hand towards Tommy. “ *Come on. I’m sure you’re tired and Wraith’s probably wondering where you are. The council won’t be for a day or two.* ”

Tommy looks at the hoofed hand held aloft in front of him.

This is a choice. *His* choice.

He could push himself off the ledge, fall, and sink into the lava. Bring his problems to an end. Neethel wouldn’t stop him.

On the other hand, he could go back to his tent, press his back against Wraith’s and drift off to sleep. He could ask Lethi for a few tips on how to care for his spear on the morning. He could sing with Neethel one last time.

With the acrid taste of regret in the back of his mouth, Tommy takes Neethel’s hand and lets himself be tugged back to the Tribe.

Wraith wakes up the next day by the sounds of clopping hooves and Piglish conversation, as they prepare and pack for the next leg of the journey.

For the first time in a while, they are inside their body. It is uncomfortable, dusty, and sore. They’re going to need a lava bath soon.

“ *Tommy,* ” says Wrath, watching as he blinks his eyes open and groggily sits up. “ *We have to get going.* ”

“ *You’re back?* ” he asks, looking at them with poorly disguised hope.

“ *Yes,* ” says Wraith, smiling softly. “ *I don’t know for how long, but for now I am here.* ”

He smiles then, wide, and he throws himself into Wraith’s arms.

Wraith is stunned still for a second. It’s very... uncharacteristic of Tommy to initiate affection. Unsure, but hopeful, Wraith wraps their arms around him, floating a little higher so they can lay their head on Tommy’s.

Tommy then untangles himself from the hug, stretching and yawning loudly.

“ *I’ll go get our breakfast. Could you pack up in the meantime?* ” Wraith says.

“ *Sure,* ” he answers, putting his bed into his inventory with a flick of his wrist.

Wraith steels themselves with a deep breath and then opens the flaps of the tent, stepping out into the open air.

It is jarring to not see the tents they saw for the last three years, instead of a random collection of unknowns sprinkled about, little to no giant fungus interspersed between them. The sight echoes uncomfortably in their memory, and the phantom chill of spending far too long on the move without drinking lava rises over their chest.

Shaking their head and smoothing down their wayward head-tentacles, Wraith starts their journey towards the feeding tent.

There is not much choice, the food available mainly consists of dried worms or pork, a few diced mushrooms, and a bottle of water. With the pace they set, gathering more food is out of the question, they've had to rely on reserves.

“*Hey!*” Wraith stops short, turning around to see Neethel running toward them. Out of breath, he says “*Keep an eye on Tommy, alright? Don't leave him alone, not even for his walks.*”

“*Why?*” asks Wraith, watching as he catches his breath.

“*Not my place to tell,*” he says, smoothing back his mane into a semblance of a messy ponytail. “*Anyway bye!*”

And with that, he runs away. Wraith giggles under their breath and shakes their head. Neethel was their first true friend in the Tribe and Wraith is sure that if they'd been born in the Tribe, both of them would have ended up being part of a sounder. Maybe even alongside Lethi.

But the suspicious glare that a young, burned warrior sends their way crashes Wraith back into reality. With a sigh, they float their way back into the tent.

Tommy's become surprisingly efficient at packing up the tent, so the only thing still on the ground is Wraith's bed. They double-check that everything is tied together right and then turn back towards Tommy “*Good job!*”

He smiles, something soft, and proud, and genuine before it morphs into a smirk. “*Of course I did a good job, I'm a Big Man!*”

Wraith laughs and affectionately ruffles his hair before passing him breakfast. Both of them eat and talk quietly. Tommy has a little book full of words he wants to know in Piglish, and they go through them in between bites. Bullshit is the last word in the list, and Wraith can't help the snort that escapes their mouth.

A horn that sounds like the splitting screech of a Ghast mixed with a scream pierces the air, and in unison, the Tribe stands and continues the march.

Wraith shrugs on the folded tent back onto their shoulders with practiced speed and rises off the ground, Tommy following their lead.

The march begins again, and it doesn't take much time for the fungus to be left behind, instead of walking into the hard netherrack wastes. Immediately Wraith misses the cover of the red, twisted umbrellas. Time blurs efficiently in the wastes, the endless rock jutting out in sharp angles making for a rolling background, making it difficult to tell how much progress they have made.

It isn't until, an unknown number of hours later, a restless murmur spreads over the Tribe and the previous silence is broken as they near an outcropping of netherrack, obscuring the way

forward from view.

And then it hits Wraith where they're going. "*By the Lord's wounds,*" they mutter.

"*What? What? What's going on?*" says Tommy, trying to jump over the crowd to see further ahead.

"*Just watch,*" answers Wraith, excitement spreading through their veins.

When they reach the outcropping, a tunnel in it becomes apparent, and the Tribe orders itself into a line and begins traversing it. By the eyes of an Overworlder or any unsuspecting onlooker, the tunnel is simply a natural fissure in the rock, perhaps a tad straighter than normal, and they wouldn't know the difference until they were face to face with a pair of brutes.

However, they are not Overworlders and the brutes part to let the Tribe through, sending wary looks at both Wraith and Tommy but remaining peaceful.

And then the tunnel abruptly ends, opening up into a massive netherrack cavern, big enough that the ceiling is obscured by fog and Wraith cannot see the other side. But, in the middle, surrounded by a lake of lava, sits a blackstone behemoth, decorated proudly by spidery veins of gold, tall walls looming with peepholes for archers and gold-armored warriors patrolling its corridors.

"*Holy fuck,*" whispers Tommy, his mouth opening wide as the drawbridge before them begins to fall open.

"*Welcome, Tommy,*" Wraith says, breathing awe with their words. "*To the First Bastion, home of the Blackstone Tribe.*"

Chapter 10

A knock on her door startles Niki out of her bed, sitting up while she attempts to make sense of... anything really. The sun is a gentle gray, barely peeking through the windows in the early morning light. Far too early for this.

“Niki? Niki, are you there?”

She frowns, trying to finger comb her blonde hair out of her face, reluctantly going to her door. She quickly opens it while tugging her pajamas to half-heartedly get rid of creases.

“Bad?” Niki says, her sleepiness fleeing when she finds her friend standing before her. “What are you doing here?”

“Have you seen Skeppy?” the demon asks, his pointy ears flickering around nervously, his white eyes pinched in worry.

“No,” Niki answers, surprised by the question. “Is he okay?”

Bad’s ears fold to sit tight against his head, his tail lashing from side to side. He’s already a head taller than he was before, probably losing control of the magic he uses to adjust his height.

“He’s missing, and we don’t know since when,” Bad says, tears trembling at the edge of his voice. “First he trapped himself with the Egg for almost a week and this morning the obsidian was cracked and he was *gone* and we can’t find him anywhere! ”

“Bad, breathe,” Niki says, moving to lay a gentle hand on his arm. “I’ll help you search for him, okay? Just let me put on my armor—”

“Thank you,” Bad says, moving to clasp both of her hands in his. “Thank you so much! I’ll tell Antfrost to come meet us here.”

Niki smiles, trying to reassure him, but as soon as his attention shifts to his communicator her smile falls. She’s been through a war, she knows the kind of gut feelings that have saved her lives multiple times before. There’s something she’s missing from the picture.

Still, she shakes her head. She’s not a soldier anymore, she’s a baker. Concentrate on helping Bad, she tells herself.

“Bad, have you sent a message to the server chat?”

“No, everybody is still asleep so I thought I could search on my own before—”

Tommy’s never been in a Bastion before, but he’s heard enough stories from Techno and Phil to know how they’re *supposed* to look. Dusty, crumbling, box-looking structures with small

differences to tell apart the types, all holding tons of treasure inside, guarded by hordes of Piglin Brutes.

That description *does not* hold a candle to the First Bastion. The blackstone shines pristine as two Brutes lower a drawbridge over the lava lake, granting them access to what looks closer to a fortified castle than a cube of blackstone.

The drawbridge opens up into a patio that Tommy immediately pegs as a strategic chokehold. If any attackers got past the drawbridge, it would be child's play for the wall guards to pivot around and rain arrows over the unfortunate bastards.

But the iron bar gate at the end of the patio is open for them, and it leads into a wide corridor where Tommy's mouth falls open. On the blackstone, golden artwork is chiseled into the rock, making for scenes of hunting, and councils, and dances glinting from the work of masterful stone carvers.

He kind of wants to stop and look at the cool pictures, but while the Tribe gets to slow down and look around, a bunch of brutes in full armor walk up to Tommy and Wraith.

"... *Let's go,*" says Wraith, carefully-hidden sorrow buried in their voice.

Tommy nods, following quietly behind them as both of them are surrounded by the guards and led deep into the Bastion. They are led through what looks to be a side path, the narrow hallway devoid of decorations, and eventually faced with an intimidating iron door that opens with a rusty shriek.

A set of stairs leads deep into the darkness, and Tommy's shoulders tense, fingers wishing to wrap around his spear, but he stops himself. Instead, he walks down the steps, the guards at his back, until they arrive at what is clearly prison cells.

He's a little relieved by the obvious dust and disuse on most of the cells, and the fact that the one cell the guards open is clean and they provided more than enough bottles of water for Tommy.

He quickly goes to check the state of the bed they've provided for him (obviously new and well-made), and then flops himself onto it. The temperature is hot, and given that he's more or less gotten used to the Nether's climate, any other Overworlder would probably be overheating horribly by now. That clues him in that the cells must be surrounded by lava.

"*Now what?*" asks Tommy, throwing one of his arms onto his face.

"*We'll get a trial,*" says Wraith, quickly grabbing a few water bottles and setting them near the bed. A frown mars their face as they sit beside Tommy.

"*There's a but,*" sighs Tommy "*Spit it out.*"

"*A big part of the trial is telling your story, and I don't know if you're good enough with Piglish to do your story justice,*" Wraith quietly confesses.

Tommy's about to sling out a protest, but then he realizes he doesn't even know what the Piglish word for "revolution" is. "*Shit.*"

"...*I could translate,*" says Wraith with a grimace. "*But that would mean I'd listen to your story, even though it is not my place.*"

"*The whole Tribe is going to hear it anyway,*" Tommy groans, burying his face under his hands. "*Who gives a shit.*"

"...*I could tell you my story in exchange,*" offers Wraith, in spite of Tommy's confused face. "*A story for a story.*"

"*Is that Piglin shit?*" Tommy asks. "*A favor for a favor?*"

"*The honor code, yes,*" says Wraith with a nod.

"...*I don't want to listen to your story unless you want to tell it, not because some— some dumb fucking pity,*" says Tommy, switching languages at the end, spitting the insult into the air.

An uncomfortable silence settles inside the cell, Tommy's body tensing on instinct. He's made Wraith mad. Is this it? Is this what finally makes Wraith throw Tommy to the wolves?

"*Tommy, you know that help is not pity, right?*" asks Wraith carefully, as if he was a wild hoglin ready to charge them.

He doesn't answer.

"*Please listen to me, Tommy,*" Wraith says, floating until they're hovering just beside his head and gently moving his arm off his face. "*Don't be afraid to show weakness. Please.*"

"*But—*"

"*Strength begins with weakness,*" recites Wraith, a pleading look to their face. "*Don't try to seem like someone you are not.*"

"*Oh fuck yo—*"

"*You can't lie in a trial!*" exclaims Wraith, the desperate tone throwing him off. "*And lying by omission counts too. If you want to stay, you have to be honest with your story, even the parts you don't like.*"

Fear, thick and choking, lodges itself on Tommy's throat. Are his hands shaking? They probably are.

Wraith silently floats over to their bed and drags it beside Tommy's. "*Sleep,*" they say, unaware of the erratic heartbeat poisoning his thoughts.

Wraith drifts off to sleep. Tommy doesn't.

Sometimes Wraith surprises themselves by waking up. Not in the literal sense, obviously, but ever since the attack on the Crimson Tribe, they've been constantly dipping in and out of a daze.

They don't remember half of the journey to the Bastion, and even though counting the mealtimes tells them they've been stuck at least 42 hours inside the cell, it feels as if it has been only a few minutes.

"— and there's this huuuuuuge hoglin stable, they're even teaching how to ride them!"

And suddenly Wraith exists again.

They blink, finding themselves in the middle of mechanically airing out the sheets they've been using in the cell, both Neethel and Lethi standing in front of the closed iron bars.

" Oh hi Wraith!" greets Neethel, his tail flicking around excitedly. *" Back from your usual haunts?"*

"Oh shush," they say, letting the sheets fall back on the bed. *" How long have you been there?"*

"Since your meal was delivered," answers Lethi, a gentle tone to their voice.

There are empty soul-glass plates sitting beside their washbasin, the water in it clean. That means they've not only had time to eat, wash the dishes and beckon for their water to be changed, Wraith also had time to air out the sheets.

" I apologize for my inattentiveness," says Wraith, their cheeks reddening through their paper-white skin.

" No need to apologize," answers Neethel with a soft smile.

A sigh of relief runs through Wraith and they levitate closer to the iron bars.

" Now that you're present, there's something we need to tell you," says Lethi, their tone grave. *"They're calling in the Voices from all Tribes."*

Despite the heat of the Nether, Wraith's blood runs cold. *" By the Lord..."*

" What? What? What does that mean?" Tommy asks, looking freaked out towards Wraith.

" The Voices of the Tribes are the ones who represent their Tribe, and their being at our trial means this issue involves the entirety of Piglinkind now," says Wraith, voice faint. *" But why would they be—?"*

"I have been told why," says Lethi, a serious expression in his eyes. *" But by my vow I will not tell."*

It is in these times that Wraith remembers that despite their gentleness and the unofficiality of their title, Lethi is still the Warrior of the Crimson Tribe, with all the responsibility that

entails.

“ *Will it harm—* ” the sound of the door opening stops Wraith’s voice midway.

“ *We have to go,* ” says Lethi, tone apologetic but leaving room for no discussion.

Both Wraith and Tommy watch as their friends leave the cells, and both are left alone again.

“ *Wraith, I’m bored,* ” says Tommy, flopping himself back onto the bed.

“ *...I could teach you how to do my face paint?* ”

“*Hell yeah!*” he answers. “ *I wanna look like a mooshroom!* ”

“*What’s a mooshroom?* ”

Tommy thinks he’s spent two days and a bit in the cell when the guards come back again, this time wearing intricate-looking gold and leather armor.

“ *Finally!* ” says Tommy, who was about to start throwing Wraith’s empty paint containers against the wall just for something to do. “ *Let’s get this over with.* ”

Wraith doesn’t speak as they float off the bed, neutral expression on their face.

Subtle crimson vines snake their way down some of their hair-tentacles, shaky and uneven, but they are Tommy’s best paintings so far. In exchange, Wraith painted a few red spots on his hands, trying to imitate a mushroom’s pelt. (And if there’s a tiny red L’Manburg flag painted right behind Tommy’s ear, hidden by his shoulder-length hair? Then that’s only for him and Wraith to know.)

There’s a strange feeling of peace settling over Tommy’s bones as he climbs the stairs out of the prison cells. He already knows how this will go. He’ll be found “guilty” of whatever they think he’s guilty of and he’ll be kicked out. He only hopes they don’t find Wraith guilty too.

As soon as he ascends into the light, he breathes a sigh of relief. He had forgotten how hot and stuffy it was down there.

This time, the guards take them through the labyrinthine corridors deeper and deeper into the heart of the Bastion, to a set of embossed crimson doors. Two of the guards step forward and swing them open.

Tommy’s breath gets caught in his throat. A wide hall enters his view, filled to the brim with Piglins, all wearing different shades and colors of what he now recognizes as ceremonial outfits. He has never been as aware of the fact that humans were rare as now; he’s never seen so many people in his *life*. There are even multiple stories, their corridors opening up into sort of terraces above the hall, dozens of Piglin talking in hushed tones.

Most Piglin wear the red of the Crimson Tribe or the golden of the Bastion Tribe, but he can even pick out a few wearing the white of the Quartz Tribe or the cyan of the Warped Tribe.

He even picks out the coal-streaked face of a member of the Wither Tribe, one of their eyes a black, scarred mess from whatever wither skeleton decided to pick a fight and lost.

As soon as Wraith and Tommy step onto the center of the courtyard, a hush falls over the people there, all eyes on the two outsiders.

Tommy instinctively shrinks under the attention, and then hates himself for doing so. He didn't use to do that. He used to *like* being the center of attention. Why the fuck would he be *scared* of this? When did he become such a—

The sound of a spear hitting the ground snaps him out of his spiral. His eyes whip to the group at the front of the courtyard. His mind flashes back to the election, when he stood in the crowd waiting for the outcome of the votes, breath held as he stared up to the stage. He blinks and the phantom image vanishes.

In true Piglin fashion, there isn't a stage. Instead all sit in raised cushions on the ground, two cushions set in the middle of the courtyard for both Wraith and Tommy. As he sits, Tommy watches the people in front of him.

The Crimson Tribe has three people there: Lethi, the Warrior; Matee, the Voice; Onoe, the Healer. The three most important roles in the Tribe. The Bastion Tribe also has three people, their own Warrior, Voice and Healer sitting, gleaming gold in contrast to the deep red of the other tribe. Surrounding them are the Voices of the other Tribes; quartz white, wither black and warped cyan, all staring thoughtfully at the both of them.

"And so the Trial begins," says the Voice of the Bastion Tribe, an intimidating Piglin with a set of golden piercings dangling from one of their tusks.

Immediately Tommy realizes he's in over his head. As the Voice of the Bastion begins to speak, he struggles to understand anything they're saying, their speech too fast and formal.

"Wraith, what're they saying?" Tommy whispers.

"Mostly underlining how the trial's going to go," Wraith whispers back. *"It's procedure, for now."*

The familiar restless energy invades Tommy's body, which is stupid. He can sit still for a few minutes, he's not a stupid kid.

And then Wraith starts talking. From what Wraith, Neethel and Lethi have told him about the trials, it's Wraith's turn to tell their story. Unlike human trials, in Piglin trials you have to tell your *whole* story, from the very beginning.

Tommy tries to understand what they're saying, but he only manages to catch words here and there. *Villager, wandering, friend*, just random pieces that he can't truly fit together.

His heart begins to thunder in his ears. He's— he promised Wraith he was going to be truthful, not hide anything. He wanted to vomit.

"Tommy."

He startles, instinctively trying to hide his shaking hands. He raises his eyes, catching the expectant eyes on him.

“ *It’s your turn,* ” Wraith says, laying a gentle hand on his shoulder. “ *You can do it.* ”

He opens his mouth.

‘ *You’re annoying, Tommy,* ’ says Wilbur’s voice inside his head.

‘ *Don’t you know when to stop talking?* ’ echoes Dream’s voice.

His mouth clicks shut.

“ *Tommy?* ” questions Wraith.

There’s a faint ringing in his ears. His eyes search for exits. He itches to run.

But then his eyes fall on Neethel, standing near one of the gates, a worried expression on his face.

His promise echoes in his ears. He only has to last the trial, and that’ll be it. ‘ *Think of it as a suicide note,* ’ whispers a morbid thought in his head.

The knot in his throat loosens just enough to take a deep breath. He begins speaking, Wraith’s voice echoing a translation just a second later.

He starts with the hazy memories of his biological parents, then the years spent in the wilderness, but his story doesn’t truly begin until he finds Wilbur.

Memories of spending days in his childhood home, Wilbur running after him in his path of childish antics, flood his mind. He lets himself savor the memories, back when he had a family. He remembers when Phil and Techno came back and told him stories of their adventures late into the night, trying to keep his eyes open to not miss a single second but always losing the fight to sleep.

He smiles when he recounts finding Tubbo for the first time, asleep inside a cardboard box in a nearby village, the only trip Phil ever took him to. He tells of growing alongside him, dreaming of adventures, not hesitating one second when they are invited to the lands of Dream’s SMP.

The early days are tinged with bittersweet shenanigans and new friendships, casual crimes and playful rivalries. But then L’Manburg began.

The ringing in Tommy’s ears gets so loud he can’t hear his own words, yet he still keeps talking.

Nights of tense waiting, Sapnap’s fires, the Final Control Room. His duel. His deaths. His sacrifice of the discs.

The Election. Schlatt. Being exiled alongside his brother and watching him slowly descend into insanity.

November 16th. Watching Techno, someone he'd always admired, set Withers loose in his country. Watching the man who was supposed to be his father drive a sword through his only family.

The days after spent rebuilding, night and day, without stopping. Greeting Ranboo, a harmless prank gone out of control. The obsidian walls slowly climbing over the country he sacrificed everything to.

Tubbo's betrayal. Exile—

His voice fails him. He grits his teeth against the tears.

Wraith's hand is slowly placed on Tommy and he grabs it, squeezing it to try and ground himself.

Haltingly, the words begin falling out of Tommy's throat again.

Dream pretending to be his friend, forcing him to give up all weapons. The crushing isolation. The casual axe-strikes if he misbehaved. The sickly-sweet words and hair-ruffles if he behaved. The siren's song of lava, if he was left alone.

He tried rebelling by keeping small things, and paid the price in gunpowder smoke.

How he decided to rebel one last time.

Wraith's hand squeezes back just as hard as his.

From then on, things become easier. He just has to speak about Wraith, and the Tribe. It's almost anti-climactic, in his opinion, ending his story in the Tribe and not the lava, but at least it's the truth.

Silence reigns in the courtyard.

"... The council will now deliberate," quietly translates Wraith as the Voice of the Bastion finally breaks the stillness.

It's as if Tommy's strings were cut, and he slumps against Wraith. He's tired. So, *so* tired. He closes his eyes.

The voices of the piglins talking rise around him and transform into white noise. A dream-like haze fills his head as he drifts.

"*Wake up, they're going to say the results,*" says Wraith, as Tommy blinks his eyes open.

"Did I fall asleep?" he mutters, rubbing his eyes. He doesn't even try to follow what the Voice of the Bastion is saying.

Wraith doesn't answer, eyes wide, staring at the group of Piglin in front of them.

“What? What's wrong?”

“ *Tommy,* ” they say, turning to face him. “ *They're giving us a challenge and if we pass we become part of the Crimson Tribe.* ”

“...What?!?”

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hands, hooved and wrinkly, gently grind roots and strange powders into a fine paste.

Eyes, the light grey color of age instead of the stark white of pigling youth, calmly measure ingredients and follow the bubbling of water.

Voices, creating dissonant harmonies, rise from the elder's throat despite only being one person.

“ Drink, sleep, ” the chorus of one intones, sinking the vibrant blue nectar into the water and watching as it turns an impossible, chimerical blue. *“ Wake, and you will have succeeded. ”*

“ Fail, and your days will run out in delirium. ”

The elder scoops the liquid into delicately carved bowls of warped wood, four sides embossed with the depictions of the four primordial gods.

“ Your lives, you may choose not to risk, ” the elder says, the warped vines growing on all over their head, obscuring their face. *“ But know that if refused, the Tribe you must leave. ”*

Wordlessly, the elder takes both bowls in their hands and holds them out in offering.

Two outcasts take the bowls, one with a shaking, scarred grip; the other with pale, hesitant hands. Both take the bowls to their lips and drink.

Tommy wakes up with a groan.

His eyes are still crusted with sleep and the bed is gently warm, warding him against the chill of the air. He tries to burrow back into the silky sheets, turning around and curling into the softness, but a beam of sunlight hits him right into his goddamn eyes—

Wait. The Nether doesn't have sunlight.

His eyes burst open.

He's in a room that he doesn't recognize, pale blue and with fancy gold trim on the edges. The bed is unnecessarily huge and after being around weepingworm silk he *knows* for a fact the bedsheets are made of the high-grade shit. There is an actual wardrobe, and well-made chests, *and an actual fucking desk what the fuck—*

Facing him is a gigantic window letting in a beam of gentle sunlight and Tommy jumps from his bed, heading over to it. He wrenches the curtains open. A view of hundreds of cottages

greet him, all of them covered by green, flowering roofs and settled nicely among tall, ancient trees.

“Prince Theseus?” He jumps, whipping around to hear whoever called him knock on the door. “Are you awake?”

“Prince?” mutters Tommy, before an instinct he didn’t know he had takes over and he responds. “I am awake, Mr. Awedude. I will come out shortly.”

“Understood, your majesty.”

“...was that Sam?” Tommy wonders outloud, before he shakes himself out of his stupor and walks over to his wardrobe. He opens the door to find a frankly ridiculous amount of different clothes. No one in their right mind would get these many clothes unless they were filthy rich.

He gulps, feeling incredibly out of place as he looks at everything in there. To procrastinate, he starts taking his sleep clothes off to find unmarred skin. Well, mostly unmarred. There are a few nicks here and there, probably from some kind of sword fight, but the burns all over his body are *gone*. So is the constant pain in his lungs from the smoke he’s inhaled and the weird tinnitus on his ears from the explosions and the respawn scars from— from—

From what was it again?

He blinks, suddenly confused. He frowns and begins digging into the closet, finding a set of clothes that look like someone took his old clothes and just made them unbelievably fancy. He finds a red silk shirt that paired with a white vest imitates the look of his signature shirt before it got shredded in—

He finds he can’t exactly recall when it got shredded, or why, so he simply shakes his head and instead busies himself with lacing up a set of leather boots. He doesn’t bother doing anything with his hair. He’s just going to have dinner with his family, they don’t really care if he’s presentable at this time in the morning.

He bursts out the door and into long, bright corridors in soft shades of blue, lined with tapestries and golden ornaments, racing down the halls with wild abandon. He shouts greetings at the servants he runs by, soaking in their responses like a sponge.

“Tommy!”

He skids to a stop as he passes where the voice came from, slipping on the polished marble floors and flailing like a newborn calf before he catches himself.

He turns to see Willbur laughing at him, eyes sparkling with mischief.

A surge of relief hits Tommy so hard it almost makes his legs give out under him. Instead, he walks forward and wraps his arms around Wilbur, gripping onto his fancy blue jacket as if he would leave at any second.

“Whoa!” says Wilbur, but even then he hugs Tommy back, resting his chin over unruly blond curls. “What’s with the clinginess today?”

“I’m not clingy, bitch!” fires back Tommy, untangling himself out of the hug and sticking his tongue out at his brother.

“You *just* tried to squeeze the life out of me, Tommy!” Wilbur says back with a playful tone. “You were *this* close to ripping my jacket with your little gremlin grip.”

“Grip this!” Tommy says back and as quick as lighting he snatches the glasses off of Wilbur’s face and breaks into a run again, laughing loud and free over his brother’s shouts of protest.

He keeps running until he finds a wide carved door and bursts through it. He sees his father jump, his wings puffing out in surprise, where he’s seated at the table. Techno doesn’t even blink, instead he keeps eating his cereal.

“YOU LITTLE SHIT!” screams Wilbur, and Tommy barely dodges his tackle, instead bursting out into a sprint around the breakfast table.

Before he can do one lap around it, Phil simply extends his wing, making Tommy smack face-first into it and fall to the ground, spluttering, sneezing as bits of feathers get stuck in his nose.

“L,” deadpans Techno, before taking another bite.

“Tommy, give back Wilbur’s glasses,” says his dad, fondness in his voice while trying not to laugh.

Tommy pouts—*frowns*, he’s too manly to pout—before he has a great idea. “Think fast!” he yells before throwing the glasses up in the air and dashing towards his seat.

Wilbur *does* think fast and lunges towards the glasses, fumbling the catch and barely gripping them before they hit the ground.

“Tommy!” chastises Phil.

“Sorry!” he answers, not sorry at all, and he begins eating his breakfast (pancakes, hell yeah!) while delighting in Wilbur’s annoyed face.

“Eat fast, feral child,” says Techno, polishing the last of his food. “Today is fighting practice.”

That effectively wipes away all ideas of having a food fight with Wilbur. Tommy digs into his food as fast as he can, practically inhaling the sweet, fluffy treats. He finishes in record time, studiously ignoring Phil’s calls for him to slow down.

“Done!” Tommy shouts, springing out his seat and following Techno out the doors as his cape swishes out behind him.

Tommy tumbles to the ground, his muscles burning satisfyingly as he shrieks. “Oh, come on! This time I had it!”

“Not even close, Theseus!” quips Techno, bending down to grab Tommy by the scruff of his clothes and lift him up into the air.

“OI! Let me down!” Tommy says, kicking wildly in the air like a little kitten.

Techno snorts and drops him, Tommy stumbling but still landing on his feet. “Lesson’s done, pest. Go put the swords back in storage.”

“Why me?” he whines. “You’re being a hardass Techno. You’re being a bitch!”

“I am teachin’ you by the goodness of my heart,” Techno answers, unlatching his crossbow from his back and aiming at a target at the other side of the training arena. “Now leave before I use you for target practice.”

Tommy huffs, picking up the forgotten practice weapons before loudly singing
“TEEEEECHNO IS A HARDAAAASS! HE MAAAKES ME DOOO AAAAAAALL
THE WOOOOOOORK!”

He leaves the training arena, still singing at the top of his lungs, but not without catching the edges of his brother’s smile at his antics. He walks towards the shed at the corner of the arena, smiling as the sunlight touches his skin.

He opens the shed by kicking the door, walking into the dusty interior and placing the swords back onto the rack. He claps his hands to get rid of the dirt coating them before a glint catches his attention.

There, leaning against the wooden wall, is a spear.

Tommy pauses. He hasn’t seen a true, battle-ready spear in his life, all of them made for decorative purposes. His steps take him to it, a magnetic pull drawing him towards the simple but sturdy weapon. His fingers wrap around the handle.

Like a thunderbolt striking a tree, his memories come back to him.

He collapses on the ground, tears gathering in his eyes. He’s suddenly pained by ghost wounds, not present on his body but his mind insisting on the scars that should be there.

“You sadistic bastards,” he says, gritting his teeth painfully. “You FUCKING ASSHOLES!”

He punches the ground hard enough to split his skin open. The pain doesn’t feel real. Nothing around him *feels* real anymore, because he knows it isn’t.

With a pained, strangled scream, Tommy throws the spear as far as he can and watches as it clatters against the wall and to the ground. He needs to get *out*. He needs to get *away*.

He runs as if he’s being hunted, the arena blurring past him, the corridors, the tapestries, the windows framing a growing town. He slams into his bedroom door before he opens it,

crashing recklessly into his room.

He falls back into a habit of his childhood and drags the sheets off his bed and stuffs them under it, before squeezing himself under it too. The darkness embraces him, allowing his senses to disconnect.

“I don’t want to remember,” he whispers to himself, curling into a ball so tight it’s painful. “I want to forget, please, please, I want to forget.”

His body shakes. “*I want to forget.*”

Tommy startles awake under the bed. His mind rages against him, cursing at his idiot decision to sleep in such a tight spot, but he *knows* that this... this mirage he’s in is safe. Nobody would hurt him. He has nothing to fear.

Another knock sounds from his door. “Tommy?” Wilbur’s voice says from the other side.

Hurrying out of his little nest, he drags himself and his sheets back onto the bed and pretends as if he’d just woken up.

Wilbur carefully opens the door, softly stepping into the room and walking over to Tommy’s bed with an expression of concern. “Are you okay, Tommy?”

“Yeah, why the fuck wouldn’t I be?” grumbles Tommy, trying to burrow back into his sheets.

“Techno told me you screamed in the arena shed and then ran into your room,” says Wilbur. “He thought you’d found a spider and freaked, but then you didn’t come for lunch. What’s going on Toms?”

The nickname stabs a bolt of pain into Tommy’s chest as Wilbur’s hand comes to rest gently on his head, carding his fingers through his hair.

“Wil...” Tommy says, turning around to face his brother. “If you... if you could live in a perfect world, but you knew it was all fake, would you still do it?”

“Where did that come from?” Wilbur asks, confused, his hand pausing his soft caresses.

“Just answer...” Tommy grumbles, his tone evening out as Wilbur starts petting his hair again.

“I... hmm,” Wilbur says, dragging a hand over his own hair and settling himself better on the bed. “Well, I don’t think I could ever rest easy knowing it was fake, you know? Wait, would I have to leave anyone behind in the imperfect world?”

Tommy’s mind flashed to Wraith pouring thick potions over his scars to help with the itching and pulling, Neethel teaching him how to sing, Lethi correcting his stance with patience.

“Yes...”

“Then no way!” he says, turning his pets into a noogie. “I’d never leave!”

Tommy freezes, a painful knot lodged in his throat.

“C’mon Tommy. At this rate you’re gonna miss dinner too,” Wilbur says, playfully tugging Tommy’s arm to get him to stand.

He doesn’t answer, but he complies.

A day slips by Tommy’s fingers. And then another. And another.

He meets Tubbo, a peasant that lives near the castle, and laughs until he’s breathless while they sneak out of the royal palace. Niki gifts them sweets while Ranboo hurriedly takes off his apron and takes off into the streets with them.

He meets Dream, a neighboring Lord, and remembers how it was before the wars started, back when Sapnap was his friend and all three of them could set minor fires, and Dream showed off his skills for him.

Even Schlatt is there, a successful businessman presenting items from all corners of the world and beyond.

He doesn’t want to leave. But he can’t bring himself to stay.

Tommy watches himself in the mirror, dressed in clothes so expensive they probably cost more than his old house and tries to convince himself that it’s him staring back.

He sighs, taking off his jacket and messing his hair up, freeing it from the orderly locks it’d been wrangled into for the earlier court hearing. He sinks into his bed, his body dragging him down with tiredness that has nothing to do with something physical.

He can’t keep going like this.

With a violent sigh, Tommy stands up from his bed and drags himself to his bedside drawer, opening the door. Inside is a bell, chipped and scuffed but lovingly polished, the gold-painted iron shining comfortingly.

Tommy takes it and places it reverently on his desk, moving his chair so he’s sitting in front of it.

He takes a deep breath and nudges the bell so it chimes softly. “Prime,” he whispers, closing his eyes. “I’m lost. I... don’t know what to do. I don’t want to hurt again. Please, help.”

He lets the bell ring in his room. Praying to Prime had always helped him to calm his mind, to feel protected when there was nobody around. He’d even sneak out during the wars to pray in the Prime Church in the SMP. He’d even spotted Dream or Sapnap watch him make his way into the Church, but never once had they stopped him.

He rings the bell once more. Exhaling as his thoughts slow.

'Do I want to stay?, ' he asks himself.

He doesn't want to hurt anymore. He just wants to rest. To feel safe.

' You promised me to stay alive until after the Trial, ' whispers Neethel's voice in his mind. ' This is part of the Trial. It hasn't ended yet. '

"I promised," says Tommy, opening his eyes to stare at the bell. "I promised."

The weight on his shoulders, on his mind, sits heavier upon him. But he knows he's already made his decision.

"Good! You should always keep your promises."

Tommy startles and whips around to stare at the source of the voice. A woman, skin a deep purple, smiles at him, gold dust penciling her features and moving to the beat of an unheard song. Her hair, a pure white, trails behind her to the floor, golden ornaments and crystals woven into it, spilling over a golden robe. Her eyes are amethysts, sparkling with mischief in his direction.

"Prime?!?" Tomy asks, staring open-mouthed at the woman.

"You recognized me so fast!" she says, giggling, before she steps towards him and engulfs him in a hug. "Finally, you reached out to me with an offering."

"What are you talking about?" Tommy says, returning the hug hesitantly.

"Tommy, Tommy, Tommy," she says, smoothing his hair. "*I* am a goddess of life and you just decided to *live* . That is the best gift you could have ever given me."

His words escape him, staring.

"Come, my little Champion," she says, booping his nose before taking his wrist into her hand. "I'll show you the way out of this delusion!"

She tugs him out of the room, slamming the door open with cheerful abandon. Tommy struggles to keep up, but her laugh is contagious and soon he's giggling along with her. For a second, he's happy.

And then they both arrive back at the shed, still as dark, still as dusty, still as full of practice weapons as last time. And there, innocently laying in a corner, is his spear.

Prime lets go of his wrist and walks over to the weapon, picking it up and twirling it like the world's deadliest baton before offering it to him.

Tommy takes it, gingerly, slowly, in his hands, feeling the crimson wood under his fingers.

"... What do I do now?" he says, gripping the weapon tightly.

"What do *you* want to do?" Prime answers.

Tommy's about to retort back, when knowledge springs forth in his brain. He could break the spear and he'd forget he ever came from another place. He'd live the rest of his life in this world none the wiser to all the pain he's endured. Or....

The door of the shed busts open. Philza, Wilbur and Techno walk into the room, swords at the ready and pointed directly at Prime.

"Who are you and what are you doing with Tommy?!?" shouts Phil, eyes narrowed and wings spread out in a show of aggression.

Tommy takes a second to take them in as they burn with protective fury. He hoards all the love he can, and scurries this memory to the deepest, most secure part of his mind, where he tucks it away.

"Techno..." Tommy says. "I wish you'd stayed. I wish you didn't push me away."

"Wilbur, I wish you'd trusted me with your pain," he continues, watching as Wilbur's face falls in confusion.

"Phil... Dad. I wish me and Will could have been as important to you as Techno," Tommy says, a bittersweet smile on his face.

"I wish we could stay like this forever. Like before," says Tommy, taking the spear with both hands and aiming the tip towards the floor. "But... things have changed. *You* changed. *I* changed. "

He takes a deep breath.

"I don't like that we changed. But I accept it. And I let it go."

And with a scream, he drives the spear into the ground. Cracks, white and gleaming, spread out from the point of impact, climbing the walls, shattering the ground, disintegrating into motes of light. His family smiles as the world falls apart, the cracks climbing their bodies.

"Wait. WAIT!" Tommy screams, trying to reach out to them. The fear he's been trying to push down surges back into him.

"It's okay," Prime says, laying a hand on his shoulders. "You won't be alone."

Tommy, impulsively, hugs Prime as hard as he can. "I'm scared," he whispers.

She runs a hand over his hair as the ground below them disappears, leaving them floating in disintegrating nothingness. "That's okay too."

"I- I don't think I can promise I'll live," he says, his voice shaking.

"Then promise me you'll live one more day," she says, placing a soft kiss on the top of his head. "And each morning you can pray to me, and I'll ask you to live one more day. You can say no, but I'll still keep asking."

“Okay,” he says, letting silent tears fall.

“One more thing before you go, my little champion,” she says, drawing back so she can look him in the eyes, a fond smile on her lips.

“My name is ~~Clay~~ Clay.”

Tommy wakes up.

Wraith is slammed with a wave of relief and gathers Tommy into their arms. “ *You’re okay, you’re okay, by the gods you’re okay.* ”

He doesn’t answer, instead clinging to Wraith with heart-wrenching sobs. Both of them are shaking. Lethi and Neethel aren’t far behind, coming to wrap their arms around both of them.

“ *You did it,* ” Lethi says. “ *I’m so proud of you.* ”

“ *Don’t scare us like that,* ” Neethel says, rubbing his back comfortingly. “ *You little gremlin.* ”

A wet laugh escapes Tommy’s throat and Wraith draws back so they can wipe his tears away.

Their hands freeze on his face.

“ *Tommy,* ” Wraith says, their eyes wide. “ *Why are your eyes golden ?* ”

“ *What?* ” he says.

Lethi fumbles for their axe, unhooking it from their back and passing it to him. Tommy takes it, turning it so he’s facing the shiny side of the blade.

His eyes widen even more as he sees his bright golden eyes stare back at him.

Chapter End Notes

I speedran this chapter in a day. One whole day of writing. I am proud of myself but at the same time questioning my decisions.

Anyways, now we're moving onto what I call the "godly arc"!

By the way, the royal scenes were inspired by this fic [Evermore](#) (40774 words) by [rabiddog](#)

Be warned tho, it's a very sad fanfic

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“ –and then she called me her champion while everything turned to dust,” Tommy says, finishing his recounting while he cradles a bowl of warm soup in his hands. “ And then I woke up. ”

The elder of the Warped Tribe folds his hands and rests them on his chin, his light grey eyes lost in thought. Silence reigns in the Bastion’s infirmary, so Tommy starts sipping the soup. He’s parched, having been trapped in his Delirium for a day and a half, which according to the Elder it had been a dangerous amount of time to be unconscious.

To distract himself from the silence he glances around. The infirmary, in contrast to the rest of the Bastion, is made out of bright polished quartz, probably because stains are easy to see in the white and the smooth material doesn’t suck up blood the same way blackstone does.

“ Did she tell you her name?” asks the elder, finally moving and reaching over to his leather pack, rooting through it.

“ Ye– Yeah,” Tommy answers, his voice rough from talking after disuse. *“ It’s– ”*

“Do not say it,” he says, fishing a pouch of glowstone dust from his pack, taking a handful of it and spreading it on the table. *“ A god’s name is something precious and only entrusted to a god’s Champion.”* He then sighs, the stern tone draining from his voice.

“ Do you know, child, of the devotees of the Gods?” he asks, drawing a few symbols on the lightly-glowing powder. The symbols look kind of familiar, but he can’t quite pinpoint where he saw them before.

“ Not a kid,” automatically snaps Tommy before he grimaces, his shoulders hiking up with dread at his own disrespect.

“ Youngling, then,” says the elder with a small smile.

“ No. I don’t really know,” he answers, looking down at his half-cooled broth.

With a nod, the elder holds his hand over the powder and it starts almost *vibrating* in place. Tommy looks on in awe as some of the dust slowly starts rising from the table and then curls into the shape of Prime’s symbol; a set of eyes separated by a golden staff, usually simplified into a cross shape.

Then the rest of the dust rises into the air as well, dancing into three other symbols. A heart with a set of folded wings resting inside, representing Lady Death. A round mask with an X carved into it, representing Exdeh. A horned skull, blood dripping out of its mouth, representing the Blood God.

“ North, South, East, West, ” recites the elder. “ Life, Death, Order and Chaos. ”

“ Each of these gods rules over their domain, most existing in a higher plane of existence we cannot access: the Aether, the place where the universe’s code sings. ”

Tommy leans forward. Displays of raw magic like this, not filtered through lapis and carved into weapons, are rare and so very difficult to achieve. He’s mesmerized as part of the dust shifts from the symbols of the gods into a representation of hundreds of people below them; piglins, humans, villagers, endermen; all the sentient races.

“ However, gods can interact with mortals, ” the elder says, as a few of the people reach up towards the gods, and a trickle of power settles upon them. “ If a mortal asks for a god’s power, the god can choose to lend their power for the mortal’s cause. Those people are called acolytes. ”

An old memory surfaces in his mind: Philza speaking with Techno in the few days they’d been at the house, the words “champion” and “acolyte” whispered between them, Tommy leaning against the door as he eavesdropped.

“ There is an exception to this rule, ” the elder says. “ Each god can call upon one and only one being to serve in their name. If acolytes are a god’s shield, then Champions are their sword; they fight in their name. ”

“ Wait, Prime chose me to fight for her? ” Tommy asks, his eyebrows raising. “ I mean, I am okay with a sword but I’m not at Warrior level. ”

“ It’s more important that a Champion embodies their god than being good at fighting, ” the elder playfully chastises. “ Fighting skills can be learned. True devotion? Not so much. ”

But then his face falls, a worried frown creasing his wrinkly face even further. *“ This is worrying though. One god having a Champion is normal, two slightly less. All four gods having a Champion? That is an omen of disaster. ”*

‘When am I not?’ thinks Tommy, his hands tightening around the empty bowl.

“ However there is no use worrying about that yet, ” the elder says, gesturing for the dust to fly back into the little pouch and tightening the strings to close it. “ When Prime needs you, she’ll call for you. In the meantime focus on healing, youngling. ”

“ Thank you for your words, Elder, ” says Wraith, grunting a formal goodbye that everyone soon echoes.

The Elder smiles in response before exiting the infirmary, the clip-clopping of his hooves getting quieter and quieter.

“ What do we do now? ” asks Neethel, going to pick up Tommy’s bowl and readjust his blankets.

“ The Elder said to heal, and now you’re both part of the Tribe, ” muses Lethi, crossing their arms. *“ So we should focus on getting both of you settled in. I already talked to the Healer,*

and he's willing to take you on as a second apprentice, Wraith."

"Truly?" they ask, floating a few inches higher in excitement.

"However, you need to be taught to fight," sentences Lethi, smiling in amusement as Wraith deflates with a groan.

"Tommy, you already have the basics of fighting down, but you seem to enjoy fighting so it is likely you'll continue your training despite it not being mandatory."

"I mean, yeah," says Tommy, thinking back of before the wars where he and Tubbo would practice sparring for hours just because it was fun.

"But as a member of the Tribe you have to also pick up another craft besides fighting."

"Like what?" grumbles Tommy, trying to get himself comfortable on the infirmary bed again.

"That'll have to be your choice," Lethi says, sitting down at the foot of Tommy's bed. *"Go watch a few craftspeople, think of something you enjoy doing, try new things."*

He places a comforting hand on Tommy's ankle. *"Be a kid for a while."*

The concept of being a kid jars Tommy's head a bit. He was vice-president of a country for a while, for Prime's sake. He doesn't feel like a kid anymore.

"Sure, I guess," he says, groaning before aggressively kicking the sheets off him. *"I'm getting out of here. I'm bored as shit."*

"You should still be careful," says Neethel, blowing an aggravated huff in Tommy's direction.

"Oh shut up, I've had worse," Tommy says, then shutting his mouth with a click.

"... That's still no excuse," says Neethel. *"You are now part of the Tribe and by her Lady's mercy I will make sure you take care of yourself."*

Tommy stares a little at Neethel. He searches for any sign of pity in his eyes but he only finds annoyed fondness.

"Yeah, right," Tommy says, rolling his eyes playfully. *"I am too big of a man to need help."*

Wraith snorts loudly. *"Tommy, the Big Man thing does not translate into Piglish at all."*

"Fuck!" he shouts, standing up from the bed. He wobbles a bit, but he still remains standing. He brushes it off. *"Now what's my catchphrase gonna be?"*

"Catchphrase doesn't really translate into Piglish either," says Wraith, trying not to burst into giggles.

“ Oh come on!”

Power crackles on Dream's fingertips as he shakes off the aftereffects of his teleport. Grimacing behind his mask, he looks around the barren terracotta of the Badlands. They are empty, Bad still running around like a dog searching for his master, pulling everyone he can into the wild goose chase Skeppy is leading.

Soft, weightless whispers filter into his mind, crooning sweet promises and visions of safety into the edges of his train of thought. His mouth draws into a thin line, pulling up barriers into his thoughts with the ease of practice, and begins walking toward where the whispers grow stronger.

While walking, Dream does one last check of his armor and inventory, making sure everything is still in place. If Exdeh saw fit to warn him, he should be prepared for this encounter. Long gone are the days where he could waltz in with no armor and be confident in his ability to pull through.

The sun beams mercilessly onto his heavy netherite armor, and its with relief that Dream notes the whispers seem to come from underground. Sweat is already pooling in the back of his neck.

The hole leading underground is nothing remarkable. If he didn't know better, he'd think this was someone's abandoned strip mine, the tunnel roughly carved and half-crumbling cobblestone making walking through it a hassle. Yet, he can pick out the hair-thin tendrils tunneling their way into the rock, slowly but surely absorbing it.

Finally, the tunnel opens up into a roughly-made cavern, softly twitching vines crawling on every inch of stone, turning the open space into a claustrophobic maw. It reminds Dream of a wolf's mouth, dripping the entrails of a fresh kill.

“HL:J, リ L: =:: | L:リ K!”

“Drop the innocent act, you know what you have done,” states Dream, turning to face the Egg. It’s bigger than Dream remembers it being, at least twice his own height, when before it barely came up to Dream’s chin.

“Oh, It’s you Cornelius,” the Egg answers, switching from Galactic to Voidspeech.

“Dream. My name is Dream now,” he states, walking closer to it, ignoring the squelching sounds his armored boots make against the damp roots. “But that doesn’t matter. You broke our pact.”

“I didn’t!” the Egg answers joyfully, red flowers blooming at its base. “I haven’t hurt anybody.”

“Skeppy was bleeding when I found him,” says Dream, narrowing his eyes. “A crack in the back of his skull. Care to explain *that*?”

“It didn’t hurt though,” the Egg answers, its veiny leaves shaking with barely-concealed giggles, and slowly drawing closer. “He didn’t even feel it!”

Dream grits his teeth. The thought of unloading a firework into the Egg flits through his mind, but a burn on his cheek stops the action before it forms.

“You want to hurt me!” laughs the Egg, the flowers dancing tauntingly. “Are you mad I found another loophole? Are you mad I’m smarter than you?”

The burn gets stronger and spreads through Dream’s jaw and neck, the familiar pain of his oath keeping him in check. With effort, Dream breathes deeply and dispels the thoughts of violence against the Egg from his mind until the burn fades.

“You’re planning something,” states Dream, walking closer to the Egg, uncaring of how the pressure from the egg’s song tests his mental barriers. “And the *second* you hurt someone, I will know it, and I will come after you.”

“Don’t worry! I wouldn’t dream of it,” it says, childlike glee dancing in its words despite.

Dream turns around, face blank but mind racing. As he walks out the Egg’s nest, he fishes his comm out of his pocket, thumb hovering over a certain number.

He mentally repeats the Egg’s words. It sounded to him, as if it had found a way to get what it wanted *without* breaking the oath binding both of them together. Dream wouldn’t let it get the chance.

He presses the call button. “Sam? I have another commission for you. Don’t worry, it’s nowhere near as big as the prison. Yes, I have enough payment. There’s this... *thing* I’d like to keep contained, if you wouldn’t mind—”

Tommy stumbles, barely catching himself with his hands before he goes barreling straight into the fence. Behind him, the piglin in charge of taking care of the tamed hoglins chuffs with laughter. The blond breaks into embarrassed spluttering and a mish-mash of Common and Piglish curses, making the hogmaster chuff even harder.

The baby hoglin that Tommy was trying to pet squeals louder and tries to ram him again. This time, he manages to dodge the little asshole, who ends up headbutting the fence and then running, squealing back to its mother.

“Ha! Take that!” Tommy says, flipping the baby hoglin off before hopping the fence of the enclosure. “Little shit.”

The hogmaster shakes her head fondly, then gestures for Tommy to give back the gloves he was given. With a grumble, Tommy does as he’s told.

He freezes when the hogmaster gently headbuts him and goes to put the gloves back onto the rack. Ever since he’s become part of the Tribe, the adults have been treating him exactly as

they would any other piglin young, casually demonstrating affection at every turn. He doesn't know what to do with it. Every fond headbutt, smile and "good job!" makes his skin crawl.

He shakes himself out of his paralysis, calling a goodbye over his shoulder before scurrying out of the hoglin stables and back into the Bastion proper. The corridors of the Bastion are chock full of piglins. Clearly it wasn't made to hold both the Crimson and Bastion Tribes at once, but the expansion of it is slow-going.

He should probably go back to helping them build, but he's not sure if the Head Mason will still shoo him out and tell him to go have fun and not work so hard. But he can be pretty annoying, so maybe he can annoy him into letting him work—

"*Tommy!*" calls Lethi, the warrior clearly back from a trip to the infirmary, judging by the white gauze around their arm. "*How's the search going?*"

"*Hoglins don't like me,*" says Tommy, gesturing towards his dusty clothes and the small rip the dumbass baby hoglin made on his shirt. "*I am not going to be a hogmaster, fuck that.*"

Lethi chuffs in the piglin version of laughter, their ears twitching along with it. And then their expression turns more serious, concerned, almost like they are talking to a baby strider, trying not to spook it back into the lava. "*Tommy, we have to—*"

'No, no, no, we are not talking about *shit*' Tommy thinks, a surge of panic running through his veins.

"*Nice to talk to you, I— I have another— fuck I don't remember the word— I gotta go, bye!*" Tommy says, speed-walking past Lethi and ducking into the nearest open door. Holding his breath, Tommy listens as the distinctive, armor-clad footsteps of Lethi continue down the corridor.

Letting go of the breath he was holding, Tommy slumps against the wall. The panic buzzing in him slowly starts to subside.

He's not a coward. He's not! He really isn't! But he doesn't know what the fuck he's supposed to do all those times his new family clanmates try to *talk*. None of what he said at the trial was ever supposed to leave his mouth. None! He thought he wouldn't have to deal with the past and those stupid *memories* anymore but now he's still here and he doesn't *know what the fuck he's supposed to do—*

"*Uuuh, are you okay?*"

Tommy startles, whipping his head up. In front of him is another piglin, staring down at him with an expression of awkward concern.

"*Yeah, yeah, I'm fine,*" Tommy says, swallowing back the jitters and drawing up the most convincing smile he can muster. He blinks when he finally takes in the piglin in front of him. They are *easily* the most buff piglin he's seen in his *life*. Their arms are thicker than his head *holy shit*, even Techno wasn't that buff. They're taller than Techno too!

“ *Oh, you here for the apprenticeship?* ” they ask, tilting their head.

“ *Sure,* ” Tommy says, getting up to his feet and dusting himself off as casually as he can.

“ *Good!* ” the Piglin says cheerfully, drawing up with a cheerful smile of relief. “ *Name’s Anala, female pronouns. Here, put this on!* ”

Anala then hands him a thick, heavy leather apron, a purple-reddish color that Tommy immediately clocks in as strider hide. Wait. Fireproof apron?

He looks around the room and immediately spots the forge in a corner of the room, the sharp shine of the lava surging from there. He’s in a smithing apprenticeship? Ugh, he’s going to be making hammers the rest of the evening, isn’t he.

“ *I have to finish making a piece really quick, but after that we’ll get started!* ” Anala says, picking up a heavy pair of tongs and fishing a piece of metal from a bucket of... oil? Isn’t that supposed to be water—

The glint of something shiny catches Tommy’s attention and as he turns to look, he gasps.

Resting on a stand is a set of armor, sleek and deadly. It isn’t like the bulky, crafting table-created armors he’s used to; each item consists of clearly interlocked plates in such a way that allows greater freedom of movement, chainmail draped under all the weak spots Tommy memorized in the wars and effectively covering them.

But at the same time, the armor is a deep black, despite the fact that Tommy can tell the metal is solid netherite, the usual purple color nowhere to be seen. There is gold swirled over the surface in intricate, tiny details as if they were glistening rivers running through the metal.

It is a *masterpiece* of form and function. Tommy wants to steal it.

“ *Ya’ like it?* ” says Anala, a proud smile on her face. “ *One of my best works, that is.* ”

“ *It’s amazing,* ” Tommy breathes.

“ *It ain’t even enchanted yet!* ” gloats Anala a little. “ *Want me ta’ teach you how ta’ make it?* ”

“ *YES!* ” Tommy says, ideas for cool weapons already running through his head.

“ *Okay, come over here, piglet,* ” Anala says, nudging Tommy closer to the forge and sinking the piece of metal into the blazing heat. “ *So, first things first is learning the names for all yer tools...* ”

Translation of enchantment table language: "Hello Cornelius!"

Here we go! Now we are shifting into the main plot of the story! This chapter was a little tamer since we're gearing up for a few reunions soon!!!

ALSO FUCK CORONAVIRUS. DESTROY THAT ABOMINATION. DEATH FOR THE VIRUS IN THE NAME OF THE BLOOD GOD. GET VACCINATED BITCHES
AAAAA

Also I love comments. They are literally the best part of my day!

(That said hi Astridgracee! Nice to see you're enjoying this!
Laizybird, love your tags. Migran thank you for your all-caps. And Chockyyy I'm glad you think it's good.)

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy weaves through the crowd of piglins with practiced ease, carrying in his hands multiple sets of newly-forged practice weapons. He talks loudly with Anala, her own arms also full of weapons, as they walk the now-familiar path to the Bastion training area.

“—wasn’t my fault that I didn’t notice the fire res potion! Wraith’s potions are really fucking good, there aren’t going to be many particles coming off you,” says Tommy, emphasizing his words with his arms and almost swinging his pile of weapons into another walking Piglin. *“Sorry!”*

“ You shoul’da had more faith in me, piglet!” Anala laughs, throwing her head back. *“ Yer face was worth it though. ”*

“I saw you putting a finger in molten metal, of course I freaked the fuck out,” huffs out Tommy, readjusting the pile as the black corridor opens into a wide chamber, mats of dried fungus covering the floor and racks of wood full of many weapons covering the walls.

“ You know what? Ta’ make the fright up to you, I could teach ya bare-hand forging,” replies Anala, a fond smile on her face. *“ I reckon yer getting good enough at this to start the more finicky stuff.”*

“ Really?!?” shrieks Tommy, a wide smile on his face. *“Hell yeah!”*

“ Yer a natural, kid,” explains Anala, softly bonking her head against Tommy’s. *“ We gotta deliver these before that, though. ”*

“Right!” says Tommy, speed-walking over to the training weapons rack. He lays the new weapons on a messy pile on the floor before he takes a few and places them in the right shelf. At the same time he quickly scans the weapons already there and picks out the ones that need repairs, placing them in another pile at his feet.

He marvels at how easy he can now pick up the weapons. Through Neethel and Wraith’s careful (sometimes overbearing) nagging, he’s slowly been regaining the weight he’d lost in Exile and he’s now almost back to a healthy weight. But besides that, forging has been helping him get stronger, the beginnings of *actual* muscles showing in his arms.

Soon he’s done, and he turns around to search for Anala. She’s still placing new weapons on the non-practice racks, her pile at least twice the size of Tommy’s. He’s got a bit of time to burn before he has to go back to the forge—

Thwack! The sound of an arrow hitting its target pulls Tommy out of his head. His grin widens when he spots Wraith, face pinched in concentration, as they knock another arrow into a crossbow and aim at a target on the other side of the room.

“ *Wraaaaaaith!* ” shouts Tommy, sprinting past the other training Piglins before stopping beside the now softly-smiling Ghast hybrid.

“ *Tommy, are you trying to skip smithing practice?* ” says Wraith, a teasing smile on their face.

“ *Who the fuck do you think I am?* ” he answers with an exaggerated offended tone. “ *I am the best blacksmith apprentice there is!* ”

“ *You are also the only blacksmith apprentice there is,* ” cuts in Lethi, an amused quirk to their lips while they casually lean against their warhammer.

“ *Oh fuck off,* ” huffs out Tommy and half-heartedly tries to knock the warhammer of balance and make Lethi trip onto the ground, but of course the asshole is barely phased. “ *For your information I was gracing the training area with my newly-forged weapons.* ”

“ *I’ll be sure to test those extra hard,* ” jokes Lethi and dodges another playful swipe. “ *Wraith, go back to practicing. You can talk at the same time.* ”

“ *I didn’t know you were still learning to fight better,* ” says Tommy, looking as Wraith sets their crossbow back into position and aims at the target.

“ *I mostly practice while you are in the forge,* ” answers Wraith. They let the arrow fly, striking dead center with a satisfying *thwack!*

“ *Nice shot!* ” answers Tommy, looking at the cluster of other arrows crowding the bullseye. “ *I thought you were with the healers?* ”

“ *The Tribe has enough healers,* ” answers Wraith, loading another bolt. “ *They need a Potions Master and a sharpshooter more.* ” Thwack!

“ *Yeah, fucking piglins and their shitty vision,* ” says Tommy and nimbly dodges a swat by Lethi. “ *Aha! Too slow— ow!* ”

Tommy gives the stink-eye to Lethi, gingerly rubbing the spot where their hooved hand flicked his forehead.

“ *Humans and their fragile skin,* ” huffs Lethi before gently bonking their head against Tommy’s. “ *I still have a few others to supervise, I’ll be back soon.* ”

“ *Dickhead,* ” is Tommy’s response while Wraith nods and fires another bolt. “ *That target’s getting kinda crowded... want me to throw things for you to shoot?* ”

“ *Please do,* ” answers Wraith, levitating up to the target and quickly gathering all the arrows back into their inventory.

Tommy quickly finds a bunch of pieces of broken wood in a corner (probably what’s left from wrecked targets) and pulls them into his inventory. He stands beside Wraith and grabs the first piece before winding back and throwing it in a neat arc.

Thwack! Perfect shot.

“ You are fucking cracked,” Tommy says, summoning another chunk of wood. *“ Didn’t know you were good at this.”*

“I gave up fighting for a long while,” confesses Wraith. *Thwack!* The shot misses, but not by much. *“ It’s only recently I decided to begin training.”*

“Why’d you give it up?” asks Tommy as Wraith decides to switch to a bow. He winds his arm back for another throw.

Wraith doesn’t answer right away, instead letting another arrow fly. *Thwack!* The arrow glances off the side of the chunk of wood, making wood chips rain onto the floor. *“ Did you know as a Ghast hybrid, my body is more frail than a regular human’s?”*

“I had no idea,” answers Tommy, block of wood already in his hand

“ Fighting had never been my forte. When I was younger, I convinced myself I could fight despite my body, and I tried desperately to get better,” Wraith says. Their hair tentacles begin drooping as their eyes gain a faraway look. *“ But when he– when the Piglin that was helping me train left, I gave up on it. It seemed far too tiring, far too... difficult. Not worth it. I even moved out of the Crimson Forest, just so I didn’t have to fight the Hoglins.”*

Thwack! The arrow strikes the wood dead center and breaks it in two. Wraith’s eyes flicker towards Lethi, before turning forward. A soft smile draws upon their face.

“ But now it’s different. Lethi made me realize I didn’t have to fight like a piglin; I could fight the way it comes most naturally to me. And beyond that?”

Thwack! One more block of wood drops to the floor, the arrow still sticking out of it. Wraith turns to face Tommy, relaxing from their ready position.

“ I fight for more than myself. I have people to protect now.”

Tommy’s breath catches in his throat, a wave of emotion flooding his chest. *“ I– um. I’m gonna go pick up the woods– wood pieces, yeah,”* he stammers before power-walking over to the pierced woody mess covering the floor. He’s not running. He’s not! He’s a big man, he’s got nothing to run from.

Picking up the pieces takes too little time, in his opinion, but time waits for no man, not even for Tommyinnit. That, and Anala is already done placing the weapons in the racks and is gesturing with her head to get a move on.

“ Gotta go Wraith, see you tonight!” calls Tommy, hurriedly dropping a pile of arrows at Wraith’s metaphorical feet before scurrying over to pick the in-need-of-repair pile of weapons up.

He jogs up to Anala’s side, ignoring how jumpy his heart feels.

“ *You okay?* ” asks Anala, her head tilted questioningly, making the golden piercings dangling from her ears softly jangle.

“ *I am a Big Man , okay, I’m always fine!* ” Tommy answers, biting back the acidic taste of a lie on his tongue.

“ *If you say so...* ” Anala says, looking wholly unconvinced. “ ... *Want me to show you how to forge crossbow modifications?* ”

“*Hell fucking yeah!*”

Tubbo’s hiding something, and Quackity has an idea of what it is.

The shades of his room at the reconstructed White House cover the windows, sinking Quackity’s room into shadow. A pile of unfinished paperwork lays shoved to the side on his desk, the middle instead taken by a single report from Fundy.

From what the fox hybrid’s report says, Tubbo seemed perfectly innocent until he decided to hack into take a peek at Tubbo’s messages. And there, written in plain fucking common, was the evidence that Tubbo had *warned Philza about the arrest* .

Spineless, yes-man Tubbo had decided to *betray L’Manburg* , just like that! And for what? Updates on his friend? Tommy’s probably building fuck-ugly cobblestone towers in some remote corner of the Nether and harassing innocent Striders by drawing dicks on their heads.

Quackity punches the table, making the glass teetering on the edge of it crash onto the floor, spilling three-day-old whiskey all over the floor. His wings painfully tug against their restraints, buried under his clothes, instinctively bristling.

“Quackity? Everything okay?” comes Ranboo’s hesitant voice through the door.

“Yes, just a stupid glass. I’m fine,” he answers, dragging a heavy hand through his face.

It’s fine. He’s fine. He can work with this situation, Quackity assures himself, plans already starting to take shape in his mind.

He should have never trusted Tubbo to put L’Manberg before Tommy, but it’s fine. Quackity can trust himself to do that just fine.

Technoblade *will* pay for what he’s done, and Quackity will make sure of that.

Usually, Tommy’s dreams make absolutely no fucking sense. Which is why he notices the *second* his dreams turn from a remix of his trauma’s greatest hits into an apple tree orchard, fireflies gently swaying in the air. The cool night breeze softly flows through Tommy’s hair, the grass tickling his barefoot feet.

“Hello?” Tommy asks, looking around, but there are only rolling fields and lovingly tended-to apple trees as far as the eye can see. “Is anyone here?”

“Hi Tommy!” says a voice from his left. He turns to see Prime herself seated on a low-hanging branch, looking like a ten year-old version of herself, bits of fruit smeared all over her face. “Want an apple?”

“Sure,” Tommy says, before he decides to climb the tree and sit beside Prime. She smiles, her amethyst eyes sparkling, and passes him an apple.

He bites into the fruit, humming at the taste. It’s sweet and crisp, but it doesn’t have the fizziness of a golden apple and the need to eat one is overwhelming for a second, before Prime lays a hand on his shoulder and he can breathe again.

“Sorry, I should have thought about that, ” Prime says, and the apple turns into a peach. “Better? ”

“Yeah, thanks,” Tommy answers, taking a bite of the peach. “So, uh. What’s up?”

“The sky,” Prime answers with a cheeky smile, before giggling at Tommy’s expression. “Okay, okay, I’ll talk business.”

“Did you enjoy your time with the Tribe?” asks Prime, swinging her legs back and forth in the air.

“Yeah?” answers Tommy, a sudden bout of trepidation making his peach taste a little like ash.

“Oh, no, no, don’t worry, you won’t have to leave the Tribe for long,” says Prime, not realizing that leaving the Tribe at all is what’s making his breath freeze in his chest. “You just need to take a little trip!”

“To where?” grumbles Tommy.

“To the summer home of my former Champion,” says Prime, extending her hand. A firefly lands on the tip of her finger. She reaches for Tommy’s hand and lets the tiny, golden insect land in his palms. “He will be waiting for you.”

Tommy wakes up with the feeling of something buzzing in his palms. He whips his hands away on reflex, and he stares as a strangely golden firefly buzzes in front of him.

He groans and turns around, wanting to go back to sleep. The little shitheel of an insect then lands *inside his ear* .

“Fuck!” he shouts, swiping at his ear.

“ *Tommy, what’s going on?* ” Wraith sleepily asks, raising their head from the pillow.

“ *Fucking– I think Prime wants me to go to the Overworld to meet someone.* ”

“Oh,” Wraith says, somehow relieved and worried at the same time. “ *I was already planning a trip to the Overworld to get spider eyes and I didn’t know how to tell you that. I didn’t want to take you with me just in case someone you knew recognized you.* ”

“Lads on Tour,” snorts Tommy before sinking his head into the pillow. “*I’ll go.*”

“*We’ll head out once we rest,*” mumbles Wraith, pressing their back against Tommy’s.

“*Alright, I have everything!*” says Neethel, slinging a healer’s satchel over his shoulder.

Lethi snorts in acknowledgment, double-checking the straps on everyone’s armor for the last time.

“*Oh come on,*” says Tommy, squeezing his way out of Lethi’s hold. “*If you missed a strap after all that, I’ll eat my shoes.*”

“*They are made of leather, so technically you could,*” helpfully says Neethel before dodging a swat from Tommy.

Lethi sighs. “*I worry,*” they say, before gently bonking Tommy in the head. “*Stay safe.*”

For a second, Tommy considers replying with his usual over-the-top “big man” shtick, but he sees Lethi’s downturned ears.

“*I will, I promise,*” Tommy answers, bonking Lethi’s head back. “*I’ll be back here to nag you about spear lessons in no time!*”

“*You better,*” Lethi grumbles, drawing up to their full height and trying to look intimidating, which is kinda funny considering he’s a few inches shorter than Tommy, just like most Piglins.

“*We have to get going,*” says Wraith, floating closer to Lethi, who grimaces at the reminder they’ll be gone.

“*I know,*” Lethi answers, sighing before bonking Wraith’s head too. “*Come back soon.*”

“*We’ll try to,*” promises Wraith.

“*Alright, enough dilly-dallying!*” says Neethel, bonking Lethi a bit too hard, out of nowhere. “*The sooner you get going, the sooner you’ll be back!*”

“*Right,*” sighs Wraith. They then nod to the piglin guards at the entrance of the netherrack tunnel, who part to reveal the desolate Nether Wastes.

“*Here we go,*” says Tommy, as the little firefly takes flight from where it was hidden in his hair and fearlessly buzzes out the tunnel. “*Follow that bug!*”

“*That’s a bug?*” says Neethel as the three of them exit the tunnel. “*I thought it was like a living spark or something.*”

“*They normally aren’t golden and shit,*” answers Tommy as they step into the Nether fog. He pulls a black cloth on his face as a sort of mask, because he already has enough smoke damage in his lungs, he doesn’t need anymore. “*But yeah, that’s a bug.*”

“ *Cool,* ” Neethel answers with a smile.

Walking through the Nether feels different to Tommy now. As the biome slowly shifts from intact netherack to the subtle signs of human presence, he realizes the Nether feels familiar now. There’s none of the hurry to get out, because he now knows how to survive here. No need to leave. Except apparently for spider eyes.

It takes a few hours of walking, but they finally arrive at a Nether Portal, the little firefly blinking brightly in front of it.

“ *We can’t stay here for long,* ” says Wraith, levitating over towards Neethel. “ *Thank you, Neethel. I solemnly promise we will come back to the Bastion.* ”

“ *You don’t have to promise that, I know you will,* ” Neethel says, bonking his head against Wraith’s before doing the same to Tommy. “ *Now both of you get in there!* ”

Wraith and Tommy look at each other and nod, before taking out twin potions of invisibility and drinking them. They both disappear from view, the only sign of their presence the very subtle potion particles coming off them.

Tommy grimaces as he tries to get the moldy carrot taste out of his mouth, but he knows potions; that taste is not coming out any time soon.

“ *I’ll go first,* ” says Wraith, before the portal shifts and sputters.

Tommy counts to ten before he steps through as well. He is enveloped by the shifting purple, the familiar nausea coursing through him.

The first thing he notices is the sudden shift in temperature. He shivers a little, before his vision clears.

“ *We’re in a desert?!?* ” exclaims Tommy, looking at the glaring sun and rolling sands. “ *I thought we were in a forest or some shit. It’s fucking cold!* ”

“ *It is cool, not cold,* ” corrects Wraith’s disembodied voice. “ *At least we won’t have to wear the wool coats.* ”

Tommy balks. He thought Wraith was being overprotective by bringing those heavy-as-fuck coats, but now he realizes just how much the Nether has fucked up his temperature perception.

“ *We should get going,* ” Wraith says, before the particles where they are move forward. Tommy realizes that because they are levitating (and don’t have feet), there are no footsteps to give away Wraith’s position.

Both of them step out into a sort of paved courtyard, and Tommy looks back to see a massive arch, constructed out of masterfully chiseled sandstone, holding the Nether Portal.

“ *Holy shit, what the fuck,* ” Tommy says, turning back around to see a whole-ass sandstone castle, a pyramid in the far back. “ *I’ve never been here.* ”

“Whoever lives here must be a masterful builder,” says Wraith with an impressed tone.

The firefly shines brightly enough to catch both of their attention, and then begins drifting away to the right.

Tommy doesn't have to say anything to know they both follow the little firefly, silently admiring the architectural masterpieces the spot amongst gleaming sand dunes. They head over to what looks to be a giant statue posed in front of a temple. It's twin, at the other side of the temple's entrance, is still unfinished. The firefly stops there.

“So who are you supposed to meet—” asks Wraith, before heavy footsteps echo from deep within the temple. They get closer, and closer, before Wraith gasps as a massive, golden being emerges from the darkened interior.

“Oh, hello little guy! ” Foolish says, kneeling down from his massive, towering form. He then shrinks (which, *what the fuck?*) so he's maybe a head taller than Tommy. His golden-plated form shines blindingly in the desert midday sun. “You're Prime's aren't you?”

“Uh, hi Foolish,” says Tommy, and he snorts loudly when the golden totem jumps and whips around.

“Tommy? You're Prime's new Champion?” he asks, his emerald eyes growing in size to mimic regular eyes widening.

“Yeah, so uh—”

“Come in, come in! I think I have a few milk buckets in here somewhere!” Foolish says, not waiting for Tommy's answer before walking back into the temple.

“Let's go I guess,” says Tommy, walking in after him, Wraith following shortly behind.

As soon as they step out of the light, both of them shiver. Great. They might need the coats after all.

“Aha! Here it is!” Foolish says, pulling out a milk bucket from an ice-shelf tucked into a corner.

Tommy takes it from waiting golden hands, before handing it to Wraith. “There are two of us, big man. You have another?”

“Sure!” he cheerily answers, pulling out another bucket and giving it to Tommy.

Wraith finishes drinking their bucket, the invisibility vanishing. They look at Foolish warily.

“I don't know you!” says Foolish, the shark tail at the back of his head wagging excitedly. “I'm Foolish Gahmers! Nice to meet you...?”

“Wraith. Wraith of the Crimson Tribe,” they answer, their face searching and closed off.

Tommy finishes chugging the milk, grateful that the taste of the invisibility potion is *finally* out of his mouth—

“Tommy?” Foolish says, staring at him, frozen, a tone of horror in his voice. “What happened to you?”

He startles, a hand instinctively coming up to his face, but it’s not gonna do much. He’s now painfully aware of the network of burn-scars left behind from his little lava-dunk, nevermind the stark white marks of his time in exile.

“Don’t want to talk about it,” he stiffly says. “Let’s just go.”

Foolish nods numbly. “I’ll show you to your rooms.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is dedicated to Cookie_Monster, who helped me sooooo much in my Discord server. Seriously, they saved me multiple hours of agonizing on the story progression and what should come first. ALSO!!!! FOOLISH IS HEREEEEEEEEEEE!!! And poor Tubbo has no idea what's going to hit him.

Happy reading! (And comments fuel me. Seriously. Even just comments saying <3. Every time I get one I immediately message my girlfriend saying "I GOT ANOTHER ONE AAAAA")

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Life is unpredictable, and so are the gods,” Foolish intones, the gleaming gold of his fingertips tracing fractals into the cactus’ skin. “You can’t really control what their power does, you can only channel it and hope for the best.”

Tommy slowly imitates him, sparks flying off his fingertips and dissipating in the afternoon sun, the golden lines taking form on the bush’s dried wood.

“It’s a bit of a gamble to use them, so you can’t rely on it,” he continues. “Sometimes they’ll answer your prayers, sometimes they won’t, so it’s better to learn how to best channel the little you’ll always have than trust you’ll get the power you need.”

With a flourish, the last of the fractals connect, and Foolish steps back as the fractals pulse with power and the plant begins to grow, and *grow*. It blooms with hundreds of flowers as new branches extend into the sky, the fractals mirroring and repeating. The softly shining patterns then fade, leaving behind a cactus so big it rivals the height of giant spruce trees as it stands proudly in the middle of the shifting sands.

Connecting the last of his lines, Tommy pushes his newfound powers into the small, dried bush, and he watches as a healthy tint returns to the bark, a handful of thin new branches sprouting.

“That’s a pretty good start!” cheers Foolish, grinning with all his shark teeth on display, his shark tail wagging in excitement behind him. “These are desert bushes, they don’t really grow leaves, so don’t worry about that!”

Tommy nods, watching with fascination at the tiny shrub he helped grow. “This is so fucking pog,” he whispers, an awed smile blooming on his face.

“You’ll get better with practice,” says Foolish, taking out one of his saltwater bottles out of his inventory and taking a swig. “Those sparks mean you’re using your power but just letting it fizzle out in the air, like— like if you’re pouring yourself a glass of water and spilling some in the process!”

“It looks really cool though,” Tommy says, and just to be a little shit he makes his hands spew out sparks that dance in the air like fireflies.

“It really does!” says Foolish, his emerald eyes twinkling with amusement, before making his own hands into magical sparklers and waving them around. “We really should get going though, it’s going to be nighttime soon.”

Tommy nods and immediately starts going back to the temple. He really underestimated how cold it gets in a desert last night, and both him and Wraith had to wake up Foolish at like 2

am to ask if there was any place they could make a fire or a lava pool. He's noping out of the cold this time.

It takes a second for Tommy to realize they are making the trek back in silence. He's noticed now that he's with Foolish that he's quieter now, not really up to spilling his thoughts into word vomit anymore, now that doing so with strangers makes him feel tense and on-guard.

Normally Foolish picks up his slack, though. Tommy watches the totem from the corner of his eye, as he seems uncharacteristically hesitant to say something.

"What's the problem?" says Tommy, snapping Foolish out of his thoughts with his usual amount of tact. Which is none.

"What? Well, uuuh, I was just wondering if I could invite my papa to come here," says Foolish.

"Your papa?"

"Puffy," he answers. "She's got a few supplies she's bringing, like the flowers Wraith wanted to experiment with and some clothes better suited for you guys and maybe some treats, maybe?"

Tommy stays silent. He doesn't like the idea of Puffy coming here and knowing where he is. Another person knowing is one step closer to Dream knowing where he is.

"Don't worry, she won't tell anyone!" he promises, a nervous smile on his face.

There's something Foolish is not telling him, Tommy is sure of it. He narrows his eyes, watches as the shark hybrid gets even more nervous as the seconds pass.

"She's really good at keeping secrets, she's a therapist after all—"

"A therapist?!?" Tommy says, his hackles rising. "I'm not fucking insane I don't need a therapist!"

(He has an entire conversation with Tubbo, on the shores of Logstedshire, before he notices his best friend isn't leaving footprints in the sand. When he looks back up, Tubbo's gone and he's left as alone as he was)

"You don't need to be insane to need a therapist," says Foolish, worried and confused.

"Besides, she can really help!"

"I don't need anyone's help," Tommy snaps, fury climbing up his throat. He begins walking faster to the temple.

"Tommy, wait—"

"Fuck off!" he shouts, heading into the temple and making a beeline for his room, slamming the door shut.

“Hello Tommy,” says Wraith, sitting on the desk in their shared room, a collection of random plants, powders and potion ingredients scattered on its surface.

He grunts a greeting, the sound distinctly piglin, before he drops onto his bed.

“How was your lesson?”

“Fine,” Tommy answers, pulling out a book and quill and angrily continuing his sketch on weapons he plans to make.

Both of them work on their respective things as Wraith begins quietly singing. On force of habit, Tommy joins in the piglin tradition of singing while you work, both of them taking turns making up a counterpoint to the melody. Tension slowly leaves Tommy’s body.

“Did Foolish tell you about the magic bindings on your back?”

“The what?” Tommy says, freezing on the spot, accidentally ripping a part of the paper he’s drawing on.

“The magic bindings on your back,” repeats Wraith, their tone far too casual for the situation. “Foolish theorizes that those are why you haven’t grown wings yet, and he wanted to ask you if you wanted them removed.”

A memory slams into Tommy, blurry with age on some corners, clear as if it was yesterday on others.

(Arriving on the SMP with Wilbur and Tubbo, signing a dumb paper on the rules. He remembers ‘no flying’ being one of them, thought nothing of it.

He remembers the cold burn on his back once his name was in that paper, remembers being made fun of by his brothers for yelping at the pain.

Remembers Dream’s knowing stare that stayed on him and never left.)

“He told you that before he told me?” Tommy’s voice shakes, a phantom burn snaking all over his back.

“He wanted to see if you were aware of it, and asked me for the best way to tell you if you didn’t know,” Wraith answers, still mixing ingredients with their back turned, posture casual and loose.

“Get it off,” he says, arms bending painfully to scratch at the pain. “Get it off, *get it off, get it—*”

Wraith turns, wide-eyed and gaping, as Tommy frantically claws at his back. “Tommy, what’s wrong?!?”

“GET IT OFF,” he screams, feeling branded and marked, like goddam tagged livestock and he wants the damn thing *off*.

“Al— alright,” says Wraith, before floating out to the corridor. “FOOLISH! FOOLISH COME QUICKLY!”

Tommy throws his shirt off recklessly, the static sensation of the magic lines on his back impossible to ignore now that he’s found it. He feels warm wetness flowing down his back, staining his finger.

“Oh no, please don’t hurt yourself,” says Foolish, and Tommy flinches at his unexpected appearance, curling into himself on instinct. “Uh, Wraith can you get his hands?”

Wraith does so, holding Tommy’s hands in their own, the comforting warmth doing a little to calm his frantic shaking.

Foolish kneels behind him, his cold fingers tracing patterns on his back, Prime’s divine magic flowing through them. The bindings flare angrily at this, the foreign magic burning like static, and Tommy tries to tug his hands free on instinct but Wraith remains steady.

“Just a little more!” Foolish says, and Tommy can’t bite back the whimper that escapes his mouth.

Then the static breaks, and the relief he feels brings tears to his eyes. He breathes wetly, rolling his shoulders without resistance for the first time in two years.

“There we go!” says Foolish, softly patting Tommy in the shoulder, despite the flinch that goes through his body. “How are you feeling?”

Tommy opens his mouth, but a stab of pain between his shoulder blades makes him pause. He waits for it to pass, but it starts slowly building, pressure rising from inside of his skin.

Suddenly he remembers all the times he blamed the pressure inside his back on mining for too long, or his posture, or something else. He remembers Phil’s talons on his feet, and the way his nail beds have been aching suddenly makes more sense.

The pain in his back spikes, as if he’d been stabbed. “There’s— there’s something wrong—” Something shifts inside his skin, dragging against his ribs and bunching up against his spine. More warm liquid drips down his back. Spots of black creep in the edges of his vision.

“Tommy?” says Wraith, reaching out to steady him.

He screams, curling into himself as he feels something break the skin of his back. His eyes roll to the back of his head before Wraith can reach.

“Skepyyyyyyy,” Bad shouts down the mineshaft, sighing once his voice echoes back to him, but no sign of a response.

“I’m sure I just saw him,” says Niki, dragging a hand through her tangled hair, wincing when her fingers catch on a knot. “He was— *there!*”

Bad whips around, catching the flash of red in the dark down the right tunnel. “Skeppy! Please come back!”

He breaks into a run, his eyes quickly adjusting to the dark thanks to his demonic nature, Niki running behind him with a torch in her hands.

His claws dig into the stone as he turns sharply into a corner, skidding as an arrow flies through his horns. He hears Niki yelp and duck, the arrow embedding itself into the stone.

Bad growls, baring his teeth at the skeleton standing before him, before leaping forward and slashing at the undead until the skull crumbles into pieces and he can smell dark magic inside it dissipate.

Sitting on the ground at the end of the tunnel is Skeppy. His now red skin softly shines in the darkness, and a pang of longing courses through his heart. He wants his Skeppy back.

“There you are, you silly muffin,” Bad says, his tone fond as he steps forward on the gravelly ground. “C’mon, we have to go home.”

“... No,” Skeppy answers, shaking his head. There are small flowers blooming at the back of his skull. “It said I should bring friends. You’re both my friends, right?”

“...Sure?” says Niki, worriedly looking at him, before whispering “What’s wrong with him?”

“Then you should meet it,” he states, his voice steady and toneless.

“I’m not sure we want to,” Bad says, stepping forward. “Enough, Geppy.”

“You do,” he says, with a certainty that makes Bad’s skin crawl, that brings back memories of the days he listened to the Egg’s voice. “You will.”

And then the ground bursts, the gravel under their feet falling away to let bright bloodlines curl from the ground and grab onto their legs.

Niki screams, the strength of the plants dragging her to her knees as they envelop her head.

Bad rips his legs free, unconsciously growing larger and leaping forward to grab onto Skeppy.

“No! NO, STOP THIS SKEPPY!” Bad shouts, dragging his soulmate towards the way out.

Skeppy doesn’t say anything, instead reaching out to lay a hand on Bad’s face. His fingers are unnaturally cold, even for a diamond golem, and the demon stops in his tracks. “Skeppy? What?”

Skeppy leans forward, drawing his face closer to Bad’s, until they are so close that they’re breathing the same air.

“Skeppy?” Bad says, softly.

He stays silent as a slow, almost dreamlike, smile blooms on his face. Skeppy then exhales a red cloud from his mouth, the dust entering Bad's throat and choking him.

He coughs, and coughs, and coughs, tears of pain coming onto Bad's face, as the air in his lungs runs out. "Ple— ase. Stop," he grinds out as he fails to draw in air. *Something* is growing in the inside of his throat. Darkness flickers at the edges of his vision and he sinks into the ground. Skeppy's arms come wrap around him in the facsimile of a hug.

Tears flow out of Bad's eyes as he gags and ends up throwing flowers up, splattering to the floor with a wet thud.

And then even more flowers spill past his lips, growing out of his mouth and up his face.

The twitching, shivering blossoms cover his eyes as Niki's muffled screams bounce off the cavern's walls; Skeppy's cold embrace is the last thing in his mind before the darkness overtakes him.

Tubbo stares, waiting for his eyes to prove him wrong, but it stays.

He scrambles out of his bed, digging through the pile of clothes he left on the floor for his communicator, making an even bigger mess of his bedroom than it already was.

It's not on the floor. Tubbo stands back up and looks around wildly before he finds the damn thing on his bedside table.

He quickly taps on the chat function, clicking on the wrong contacts three times before he finally gets it right. He looks at his compass one last time, to check again.

Tubbo

Phil hesd in the overrworld nothwest from LMnaburg

Phil

I'm on my way

Chapter End Notes

Alright! I made the executive decision of speeding up the pace of the story. Shit is going down!

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Puffy barely has any time to glance at her son's masterful construction before the stranger that came with Tommy, the Ghast hybrid, hovers over to her.

They are shivering even through a thick brown woolen coat, face pinched with worry as the tentacles around their face flare and fling themselves around like a storm cloud.

"Are you Puffy?" they ask, their Common roughly mixed with a Nether accent, their red eyes a piercing glare.

"Yeah, I am. You're Wraith?" Puffy answers, her sheep ears flicking to attention.

"Yes, follow me," they say, not waiting for Puffy's answer and turning around and levitating out towards Foolish's temple.

Puffy follows, her hooves sinking in the sand as they walk onto the rapidly cooling, dark desert, a few stars peeking out in the night sky. Wraith completely ignores the paved path, instead cutting through the desert sands to shave off a few extra seconds.

(From the corner of her eye, Puffy spots an unnaturally tall cactus stretching up into the sky. A smile tugs at her lips; it's nice to know her son is having fun and being comfortable with his powers.)

Finally, the temple grows close, and both of them hurriedly step inside. They traverse the wide, carve corridors, Puffy's hooves echoing down its length before Wraith stops before one of the doors.

"Foolish! She is here," Wraith calls, and the door opens. "Greet her, I will take your place."

"Papa!" Foolish says, a wide smile displaying all his shark teeth before he engulfs Puffy with a hug, Wraith hurriedly ducking inside the room.

"Hello there guppy" she greets, hugging her son tightly. Maybe it's her father's instinct, maybe it's her training as a therapist, but she can immediately tell her son is scared, even before she spots the golden shell he encases his skin in climbing over the grey scales of his fins. "What happened?"

"I made a mistake, dad," Foolish says, clinging tighter to her. "Tommy's really hurt."

"Are you trying to fix it?" Puffy says, stepping back from the hug, a warm, no-nonsense tone in her voice.

"Yeah," Foolish says, grabbing one of her hands tightly.

"Then you're doing the right thing," she says, no room for doubt in her face. "Guilt is natural when you make a mistake. It's okay to feel it, and to use it to do your best."

Foolish nods, before the door opens a crack and Wraith's face peeks out. "Foolish, I need your magic. He is bleeding again and it is not safe to use another potion."

"Right," Foolish answers, drawing himself back up to his full height. He turns and opens the door, gesturing for Puffy to follow him.

The room is small and cozy, a roaring fire in a sunken hearth lighting up the carved sandstone walls, a few tapestries hanging here and there. There are a few chests, most of them obviously just brought in, full of medical supplies. And in a wide cot in a corner of the room, is Tommy.

He's curled into a ball so tight it looks painful, face pale and clammy, but his eyes are open and fever-bright with pain. But the thing that makes Puffy gasp is the mass of bloody, feather-coated bones protruding out of Tommy's back.

It even takes her a second to recognize them as wings, half-formed as they are, partially sticking out of his body. Blood trickles down his bare back and onto a red-stained towel, a pile of similarly stained towels swimming in a bucket nearby.

Foolish kneels down and his fingertips draw golden magic on Tommy's back, his brow furrowing in concentration.

That snaps Puffy out of her horrified trance, walks over to look at Tommy closely.

"What happened?" Puffy asks, more to confirm her hypothesis than truly asking.

"He had magic bindings on his back and Foolish took them off," Wraith answers, picking up the bucket of bloody towels and dumping them into a cauldron to wash them. "The bindings were keeping his wings inside his body."

Puffy quietly curses. "Major hybrid traits should have presented years ago," she says, remembering her own hooves growing in when she was 12, her horns painfully manifesting at 14.

"We know," curtly says Wraith, washing the towels with a violent amount of force, using a stick to avoid the painful water.

Puffy nods. She might not be a doctor like Ponk, she can't help with healing Tommy's body, but she can help heal his mind. She goes back to his side, sitting on the floor beside the bed to be at his level.

"Hi Tommy," she says, hoping a bit of conversation can distract him from the pain. "Foolish told me a lot about you."

"Yeah?" he says, his face pinched with pain and voice trembling, but he still makes the effort to smile mischievously. "Did he tell you how pog I am?"

“Many times,” Puffy says, matching his smile. “He’s really impressed with how hard you work on your magic.”

Tommy’s face flickers with surprise as if he didn’t actually expect the compliment before he plasters on a confident expression.

“Hell yeah, I’m Prime’s poggest Champion!” he says before he winces. “Fuck, I shouldn’t shout. That shit hurts.”

Puffy internally winces as well. She’s beginning to pick up hints of lack of self-esteem and troubling ease in hiding said lack.

Tommy opens his mouth but shuts it forcefully with an audible clack. He begins shaking, his eyes screwing shut. The wings in his back *move*, pushing out a little bit further out of his flesh with a wet squelch. He chokes back sobs as tears flow down his face and blood gushes out the wound.

“Damn it all,” says Wraith, lunging for the few clean towels left, and swaps the towel under Tommy’s wound before turning for a nearby chest and pulling out a watered-down healing potion.

Foolish hisses, the glow under his fingertips brightening. “Keep the potion on stand-by, I’ll tell you when it’s safe to use it.”

Puffy catches the first signs of magical exhaustion of Foolish, but right now she can’t do anything about it. Instead, she looks back to Tommy and lays her hand in his. He immediately clings to it with crushing force.

“Tommy, listen to my voice, alright?” Puffy says, squeezing back on his hand comfortingly. “I need you to breathe in with me, okay?”

One of his eyes peeks open.

“And one, two, three, four–” Puffy says, exaggerating her inhale as best she can. “And now curse while breathing out, as many curse words as you want.”

Tommy hisses curse after curse and Puffy nods. “Now back in! One, two, three–”

Foolish’s hands shake with exhaustion. It had taken a while, but Tommy’s finally alright again. He doesn’t know how long that will last. Probably two or three hours, if the cycle holds.

He lets himself fall to the floor outside of Tommy’s room, pulling his knees up to his chest.

“Foolish?” says his dad’s voice, as Puffy steps out of the room and sits down cross-legged beside him.

“Tommy’s asleep,” she says, leaning into him, her soft wooly hair pressing into Foolish’s shoulder comfortingly. “Wraith got him to eat something before, though. They are now

working on making a painkiller potion.”

Foolish doesn’t answer, instead letting his head fall onto Puffy’s, careful to avoid the horns.

“What’s wrong, guppy?” Puffy says, taking his hand into hers.

“Papa, I think I know who did this to Tommy,” he says, his shark tail curling around Puffy’s waist.

“You do?” she says, raising her head to look into his eyes.

“... It’s Dream,” he confesses, his voice shaky. “I can recognize his magic anywhere.”

Puffy’s ears fold back, a deep pain taking its place in her expression. “I wish I could still believe he wouldn’t do something like that.”

Foolish hugs her tightly, burying his face in her curls. He had noticed it too, how Dream had been changing back into the person he had been before Puffy, back when he had been an immortal hurting from his own immortality.

They’d both been like that. After the Wither Cult, Foolish had been horrified with himself and what he had done in Prime’s name. He had given up his status as Champion and was grappling with the lessened magic power that came with it.

It had been Puffy that found him, helped him get back to his feet, and given him a family that he missed so much.

But now he couldn’t recognize Dream as the brother that’d walked that painful road beside him.

“We’ll stop him, right?” Foolish says, squeezing his papa’s hand tightly.

“We will,” Puffy swears.

Sam grunts, placing the last block of obsidian in his inventory.

He stretches his back, sighing as it crackles and pops far too loudly, and then fishes a bottle of water out of his inventory. He takes a sip, taking a moment to mentally review what’s left to be done.

He’s done with the top and bottom of the giant obsidian cube, and he’s now deep underground, finishing wall three of four.

Sam has no idea why Dream paid him to build this giant monstrosity, but he’s not going to ask. It’s significantly smaller than the prison, but farming the sheer amount of obsidian needed for this is grating on him. He’s almost done though. One or two stacks more and he’s finished and he can get out of this creepy-ass place.

More than once he's sworn he could hear whispers in the back of his brain, telling him to go deeper into the caves. Other time he thought he saw people staring at him from the darkness, but every time he turned to look there was no one there.

Yeah, he's overdue for a break.

Sam walks over to his chests, grabbing a cloth he uses to try and get stone dust out of his scales. He doesn't even try to get it out of his legs, or gods forbid, his paws. He also takes off his gas mask and places it over the chest, intending to change the filters in it.

That's when he hears footsteps come from the dark of the caves. He turns his head, expecting the sounds to be nothing, yet again, but instead he finds—

"Ponk?" Sam says, straightening up with a smile. "What are you doing here?"

"I was searching for you," Ponk answers, smiling under his mask. The smile doesn't quite reach his eyes. "We're friends, right?"

"Yeah?" answers Sam, swallowing back the answer that he wants to be something more than that with him.

"Do you want to meet a friend of mine?" asks Ponk, stepping closer to Sam, so close in fact it makes him blush.

"Uh, sure?" Sam says, trying not to give away how flustered he is for this small human. "Just let me finish changing the filters for my mask—"

"No!" Ponk shouts, startling Sam enough that he releases a hiss. "We have to go *now*. Just leave your mask behind!"

"Are you okay?" Sam says, taking a torch out of his inventory and lighting it, the fire pushing the shadows away. And he can finally see clearly. "Ponk, why are your eyes red? Weren't they brown?"

Ponk narrows his unnaturally crimson eyes and pulls a sword out of his inventory. He swings.

Sam jumps backward, but too late he realizes that Ponk wasn't aiming for him, he was aiming for his gas mask. It shatters into pieces, spilling all over the floor with metallic clinks.

"You're coming with me!" Ponk screams, wildly swinging his sword.

Sam reaches for his trident and drops the torch, parrying the sword strike. He grits his teeth as he's pushed back by Ponk's unnatural strength, and he breaks the stand-off before he loses.

"What's gotten into you?!?" yells Sam, dodging to the side as Ponk slashes where Sam's neck was a second ago.

Ponk only answers by screaming louder, and a cacophony of voices *slams* directly into Sam's brain, making him wince and step back into the wall. He wheezes as the air is knocked out of his lungs, and the next mouthfuls of air he inhales taste strangely sweet.

The glint of fire on a diamond blade is the only warning Sam gets, but muscle memory takes over. He lashes out with his trident, sinking the tip into something soft and he *twists* .

An agonizing scream tears out of Ponk as he steps back on instinct, ripping the tip of Sam's trident out of his arm. There is a bleeding hole right below his shoulders, only a few strings of tendons connecting the dangling limb to his body.

“Gods,” says Sam, unable to tear his eyes away from what he’s just done. “Ponk, I’m sorry—”

A cough wrenches itself out of Sam’s chest. The air is cloyingly sweet and coats the inside of his throat, slowly sapping the air out of his lungs.

“What the—” Sam grits out. He notices a red tint to the air, raising his eyes from Ponk.

From the mouth of the cave, a red mist emanates around a slim form wreathed in darkness. Rose-like tendrils begin to snake out of it, the thorns sharp and glinting as the torch begins to sputter out.

“No!” Sam rasps out in between heaving gasps, sinking to his knees. With the last of his strength, he desperately taps an SOS and sends it to the first contact on his list.

SAM: help

SAM: palese helps

DREAM: Sam, what the hell?

DREAM: Sam? Answer already

DREAM: SAM

DREAM: I’m on my way.

Philza throws his trident, the Riptide enchantment tugging him up into the cool morning air. He flaps his wings, gliding a bit of distance despite the broken state of one of them.

Around him, his flock of crows fly in a cloud of chaotic caws. Ian, the crow he’s known the longest, loosely coordinates the effort as the crowds fly away and come back, searching far and wide for his errant hatchling.

His comm chirps and Philza lands briefly to check on it.

TUBBO: Any nesw?

PHILZA: Not yet mate. Still looking

PHILZA: How’s the compass?

TUBBO: Stil the smae

TUBBO: gotta go

Philza pockets his comm, sighing. He walks over to the nearest puddle he finds and throws trident once again. He's been going non-stop for almost two days now, and his knees are *aching*, the rough landings of his youth taking their toll.

“*Ourna!*” screams Ian, landing on top of his bucket hat mid-flight. “*Ourna, ourna, ourna—*”

“Shut!” snaps Phil, shaking his head to throw Ian off his hat, but instead the bird digs in his talons and flies off with the hat held in his talons. “Get back here you little shit!”

With as strong a flap as his wings can manage, Phil gives chase. He's far too slow without his wings in top condition, so instead he grabs an ender pearl and throws it in Ian's direction.

He falls short, the ender pearl teleport still stinging as he lands in rapidly warming sand. He hurries to place down a bucket of water and fling himself back into the air. In the distance, large and carved sandstone buildings surface out of the horizon.

With another ender pearl throw, he lands near the rather large and ornate temple, following the crow still holding his hat into the building.

“Don't you fucking dare!” he shouts, rounding a sharp corner into a narrow corridor.

Ian lunges into an open door, and Phil jumps after him, catching his hat out of the feathered menace's talons.

“Aha!” Phil shouts, stumbling his landing and plopping the hat back onto his head. “Take that!”

“Philza?” a soft voice calls behind him.

Phil turns, his easy-going smile shattering the second he processes what he's seeing.

It's Tommy, but by the gods, he wishes it wasn't him. What happened to his hatchling, smile wide and shining? What happened? Why is he covered in scars and blood, shaking? Why do his eyes, golden now, shine with fear?

It's only instinct that saves Philza, throwing himself backward as an arrow flies inches from his face.

In front of him stands a paper-white person, holding a crossbow straight to his face.

“Leave,” the person says, the Nether-sounding accent familiar, as they load another arrow. “Or die.”

Woooo! The Egg be taking over! And also Philza found Tommy! Next chapter will be interesting!

Though I'm entering a small hiatus, since I'm going to be participating in NaNoWriMo this year. Hopefully I'll get one more chapter out in November, but don't hold your breath.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wraith stares down the false father, finger poised on the trigger of their crossbow and the point of a harming-tipped arrow pointed at his throat.

“What the fuck?” Philza says, his wings puffing out defensively. “I’m not fucking leaving!”

Their answer is pressing the trigger.

Philza summons his shield, the arrow thunking into the wood and a diamond sword drops into his hand.

Wraith simply loads in another arrow, this one black-tipped. They haven’t tested this one, what better time to test it than with this sorry excuse for a sow—

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?!?” shouts Puffy. Her hands are on her hips and she’s looking at both of them with pursed lips and a downturn on her mouth that makes Wraith want to apologize.

“He came in here and—”

“They just started shooting at me—!”

“Enough!” Puffy snaps, stomping a hoof against the ground. “This is no place to fight; there is a sick child in this room! You should be ashamed of yourselves!”

Wraith’s tentacles droop as they lower their crossbow. They can see Philza grimace from the corner of their eyes, disappearing his shield and sword back into his inventory.

“Apologize to Tommy, both of you,” she orders.

“...I’m sorry, mate,” says Phil, his wings hanging down in shame.

“I’m sorry,” Wraith says, floating over to Tommy, smoothing a hand over his tangled hair.

“M’not a kid,” mumbles Tommy, his eyes fighting to stay open. His already pale skin is starting to resemble Wraith’s own an uncomfortable amount.

“I know you’re not,” Wraith answers, tucking his blankets tighter around him. “*But you can be one if you want to,*” they whisper to him in Piglish, lightly placing their head on his.

Tommy doesn’t answer, instead dragging his eyes over to Philza and looking at him. “Why are you here?”

“I was looking for you,” answers Philza, stepping forward and kneeling beside Tommy’s bedside despite Wraith’s narrow-eyed glare. “Tubbo’s worried about you, mate.”

“Tubbo’s—” Tommy’s expression flits through so many emotions Wraith can barely keep up, but then it settles into distrust. “He wants me to go back to exile?”

“I dunno about that but Tommy, what the hell happened to you? Are you—” He then side-eyes Wraith, leaning in close to Tommy to whisper “Are they hurting you?”

Wraith is going to kill this man and present his wings as an offering to the Tribe.

“No,” answers Tommy, his face scrunching up with outrage, and that is the only reason Wraith doesn’t turn that sorry excuse of a parent into a pincushion. “Get the fuck out.”

“What?!?” Philza literally squawks, his eyebrows shooting up into his hairline.”Mate, you can’t be serious!”

“Get out of here!” Tommy shouts, his voice breaking with every word. “You didn’t come to fucking visit me you came to drag me back. Fuck off, I’m never going back there!”

“You heard him, you sorry excuse for a father,” says Wraith, ready to send a fireball in his direction. “Get out.”

“The fuck— I’m the only one here that knows how to deal with overdue wings! You’re clearly going to bleed out if I leave you here alone!” He says, his wings coming up to open behind him as if to prove his point.

Wraith grits their teeth, keeping the fireball behind their teeth, hesitating.

“Then you stay,” says Puffy, her face stern. Philza turns, his face brightening. “But! You will stay out of this room and *only* come in when necessary for Tommy’s health.”

“You can’t be serious!” Philza says.

“I am,” answers Puffy, her face angling down instinctively to point her horns at him.

“Tommy’s comfort is my *utmost* priority. If he doesn’t want you here, then you won’t be here. Easy as that.”

As Philza’s mouth opens and closes soundlessly, Puffy simply moves aside, gesturing for him to get out the door with the set chin and straight back, the picture of authority. Wraith grows newfound respect for this woman, who has her priorities straight and strength in her manner.

Philza sends one more baffled look towards Tommy, who simply grits his teeth and glares back.

Good.

Wraith smirks as Philza’s wings slump with defeat, dragging his feet out the door. They follow out, Puffy staying behind to care Tommy.

“Now, what do we do to help Tommy,” says Wraith as soon as the door thunks closed, uncaring that the false father has many questions written over his face.

“You’re gonna have to yank the wings out in one shot,” says Philza, grimacing over his own words as Wraith’s eyes widen in horror. “They’ve grown too big to rip their way out slowly without having Tommy bleed out.”

“The shock will kill him!” shouts Wraith, a ghost-like screech ripping through their words.

“And the bloodloss will kill him too!” argues back Phil, his posture rigid. The only reason Wraith doesn’t kill the man is the genuine desperation coloring his features. So *now* he acts like a parent, when his child is near Lady Death’s embrace. “Look, I don’t like this as much as you do, but if you want Tommy to survive, this is the only way!”

There is a single, terrible second, where Wraith lets their pride overcome them, where they set themselves to drive this man away and try their chances with this slow, painful rhythm they have kept all this time. Yet, they swallow the bitter taste of their pride. Tommy is more important.

Philza recognizes the look with relief spelt out in his damaged wings, and his face turns serious. “Alright, here is what you do. You need to tug the wings out separately and following the curve of his ribcage; the wings grow around them—”

Phil curls around himself as screams claw their way out the closed door to his left.

He’s alone as Puffy, Foolish, and the ghost-hybrid attempt to save his son’s life. He should be in there, calming his little chick and overseeing that everything is done *right*, not desperately clutching his ears as he tries to block out the terror of possibly losing another son.

He’d tried to list build ideas, message Tubbo updates, talk with his crows, he’d even had the idea of flying away just to escape from this special hell, but even he couldn’t block this out.

He couldn’t avoid this.

Phil bites into his own knuckles to muffle his own panicked cries.

The screams pick up in volume again. They must have moved on to extracting the other wing.

He buries his hand into his own feathers, grabs a few and *yanks*, lets them flutter to the ground. He sobs soundlessly, ripping another feather out, uncaring of the little drops of blood at the end of the feather.

It’s been literal centuries since he’s torn out his own feathers. He’d thought he had left that habit for good after the years dulled his emotions, made him forget the pain of loss. Oh, how wrong he’d been.

And as sudden as the screams began, they end, leaving the kind of silence that rings in his ears. He wishes the screams would begin again, if only so he could have proof that Tommy

still lives.

The door opens, and an exhausted Foolish stumbles out the door and sinks to the floor beside Phil.

Foolish's skin is a pallid grey, the usual sheen of gold absent. It is the most mortal Phil has ever seen him, and that makes Phil's heart freeze in his chest. If Foolish had to reroute the magic he used to keep his skin golden and invulnerable into saving Tommy, then—

“He'll live,” Foolish says, his green, *human* eyes looking tiredly at him.

Phil gasps out of pure relief, hiding his face in his hands and trembling.

Thank you, thank you, my love, he whispers in Galactic. *Thank you for not taking him with you.*

“He's hurting bad, Phil,” says Foolish, his tone far too subdued compared to his usual cheerful self. “Something happened to him in exile, I dunno what. He won't tell.”

The silence lets the quiet, caring murmur of Puffy and Wraith's voices float through the door.

“Where were you, Phil?” asks Foolish, mournfully. “Where were you?”

Phil opens his mouth, a thousand sentences fighting to come out:

'I was with Techno, figuring out how to live in the tundra, helping him through his betrayal.'

'I was with Tubbo, lending a hand to a president that grew up too fast, helping rebuild a crater.'

'I was with Wilbur, his corpse, tirelessly trying to find a way to bring him back and fix the mistake I made.'

But he shuts his mouth. Those are excuses.

Foolish doesn't say anything, but his eyes look on tiredly. His eyes have regained their usual gem-like reflectiveness, and the green is slowly expanding over the whites of his eyes. It'll take a few minutes for his eyes to go back to being gemstones.

Maybe it'll be easier to look at him without shame suffocating Philza once his eyes are gemstones again.

His communicator beeps and Phil takes the distraction, pulling out the device and opening the recent chat. He taps on Tubbo's contact name, a small smile blooming on his face, imagining the sheer relief he must be feeling at finally having news on his best friend.

'Hello Philza Minecraft,' he instead reads, and Phil tilts his head in confusion far past what a normal human would be able to. *'You are a wanted man by the nation of New L'Manburg for the charges of treason, conspiracy, and aiding of known terrorist Technoblade—'*

“Oh *fuck* ,” says Phil.

Tommy’s fucking *exhausted* .

He phases in and out of sleep, his back tender and aching and relieved at the same time. Even breathing pulls at wounds, but the lack of excruciating pain is confusing after what felt like hours of agony. Hell, even longer. He didn’t realize how much his back was in constant pain until the pressure was gone. Is that the reason he’s constantly hunched over?

His head and ears now itch all over, soft feathers sprouting now that his wings are out. Growing pains he thought he’d left behind are back with a vengeance as his bones hollow and his feet bend into talons.

He presses his eyes closed, trying to bury himself inside the blankets. He wants to sleep. *Gods*, he wants to *sleep*.

“Tommy, there is a problem,” says Puffy, walking into the chamber with purpose and kneeling beside his bed.

Tommy wants to be petulant and whine like a small child, throw a tantrum, and scream. But he responds to Puffy’s tone on instinct, on the practice born of weapon drills and the sharp commands of General Wilbur.

“The L’Manburg cabinet caught on that Philza is still helping Technoblade, and they also caught on that Tubbo was keeping him out of being arrested,” Puffy calmly yet concisely explains. “They found us through Tubbo’s compass. They’re here.”

He stays silent, untangling the information. “...If they get here they’ll take me back to exile, won’t they?”

“I think so,” says Puffy, calmly taking one of his hands in hers and squeezing reassuringly. “What do you want to do?”

Tommy’s eyes widen. Does he have to *choose* now? They’re using the compass to track them, so he can’t hide. He can’t run either, not in this condition!

“I– I don’t,” Tommy’s voice breaks. And then it clicks.

‘Tubbo’s compass,’ he remembers. ‘She said *Tubbo’s compass*. He didn’t break it, Dream *lied*.’

“We’re saving Tubbo,” Tommy says, taking the blankets off of himself and standing. He sways in place, Puffy holding out her arms in case he falls. He only needs a few seconds to adjust to the new weight on his back. “I don’t care about anything else, as long as I don’t get back into exile and we save Tubbo.”

“Alright,” Puffy says standing beside him. “Foolish is distracting them, we have to go *now* .”

Tommy nods, taking a few careful steps with his still-changing feet. He aches, but the pain is at ignorable levels. He has something more important to do.

He walks through the door Puffy holds open for him, and he sees Phil's nervous smile and tense shoulders as he stands in the middle of the room. Beside him is Wraith, placing the last blocks of a nether portal, before lighting it.

"C'mon mate," Phil says. "We gotta run. Puffy will take down the blocks."

"Where are we going?" asks Tommy, his wings raising defensively. He will *not* lead anyone back to the Tribe if he can help it.

"Neutral ground. I know a spruce forest, it would give us the advantage," says Phil, before wincing as loud shouts erupt from the outside. "*Fuck.*"

Tommy doesn't wait, he runs into the shifting purple of the portal. The familiar nausea of portal traveling passess through him and he steps into the scorching air of the Nether. It smells like embers, and sounds like the crackling of fire.

He smiles. He's home.

Wraith levitates out of the portal behind him, and then enters Phil. Just after the crow hybrid enters the Nether, the portal sputters out and dies. That means Puffy broke it. Good.

"This way!" says Phil, flapping his wings to get a little boost.

Tommy takes Wraith's hand and tugs them along.

"We'll have to take a longer route since there is a netherrack mountain on the way—" begins Phil.

A giggle resonates in Tommy's mind. His golden eyes shine brighter.

"No we won't," Tommy says, raising his hand towards the peaks of netherrack. He draws a symbol in the air as Prime grants him strength, and the solid rock shifts into the opening of a tunnel.

Phil turns to look at Tommy, a look of understanding and sorrow etched in his face.

"Stop fucking looking at me like that and *move!*" spits out Tommy running into the tunnel.

Phil apparently snaps out of his daze and follows them. The rocks shift closed behind them as they move forward, and the tunnel itself is wide enough that it doesn't trigger Tommy's claustrophobia.

"Thank you," he whispers to Prime.

'You're welcome, my little champion,' she whispers back.

“We need to keep going for a bit,” says Phil, the soft glow from behind them telling Tommy he was probably checking their coordinates on his comm.

“TELL ME WHERE PHILZA IS!” screams Quackity, Foolish narrowly dodging the axe-swipe sent his way.

“Wow, careful with that!” says Foolish, frowning at Quackity. “You could hurt someone!”

“AND IT WILL HURT YOU IF YOU DON’T—”

“Stop that Quackity,” says Puffy, walking towards the group with hands on her hips.

Standing before her is Quackity, Fundy and the new kid Ranboo, who looks very much like he’s confused and doesn’t want to be there.

But a gasp breaks out her chest. “Duckling?”

“Puffy,” Dream responds, and Puffy can’t deny the stab of pain in her chest when he doesn’t call her Papa.

“What are you doing here?” she says, stepping forward towards him.

“I’m going to bring Tommy back to exile,” he answers, his smooth white mask moving towards her.

“No,” Puffy says, instinctively lowering her horns until the points are directed at Dream.

“No?” Dreams says, his mask tilting.

“Not after what you did to him,” she says, striking the ground with her hoof.

“He simply needed to learn not to antagonize everyone,” Dreams says, casually leaning on his own axe. “He’s already caused *so much* grief to the server, he needs to learn the consequences of his actions!”

“And *you* need to learn the consequences of yours,” says Puffy, narrowing her eyes. “You’re no longer acting like my son—”

“Guys! They went into the Nether!” says Fundy, looking at the compass in his hands.

“You were distracting us, fuck!” screams Quackity. “Go to the nether portal!”

All four of them run to the large nether portal framed by Foolish’s beautiful construction.

Puffy wants to follow them, but that isn’t part of the plan. She watches as they run towards the wide obsidian frame, Foolish’s hand on her shoulder. Dream is the last to leave. He looks back at her once, and only once, before he steps through.

Immediately both Foolish and her burst into action once the intruders are gone. They run for Foolish's storage, pulling out full sets of armor and ender pearls.

Once they are ready, they go through the same Nether Portal, but instead of heading towards the spruce forest they head south; towards L'Manburg.

Even with Prime's help, their pace is so much slower than Tommy would like. He still hasn't gotten the hang of running with bird feet and wings, and Wraith can't levitate much faster than that.

He also keeps having to stifle chirps and cheeps that try to crawl out of his throat, which is fucking embarrassing.

One saving grace is Phil quickly shouting tips on how to use his wings to make his jumps higher and boost his speed.

"We're almost there!" shouts Phil, flapping his wings hard enough to send a powerful gust of warm air towards his face.

Tommy grits his teeth, flapping his wings harder in response, Wraith's almost incorporeal weight comforting against his back.

"Here!" Phil says, beginning to place obsidian blocks.

Wraith barely waits for Phil to place the last block of obsidian before they send a fireball straight into them, lighting the portal in a fraction of a second. They ignore Philza's ruffled, frowning look to gently push Tommy through the portal, following a second later.

Phil is the last one to step out, and he immediately pulls out his comm. "C'mon, c'mon," he mutters, frantically typing.

And with a gurgle of magic, Fundy steps through the portal. He's snarling with his teeth bared, decked in full netherite.

Ranboo comes right after, sending a look of relief toward Tommy that soon turns into one of horror.

Quackity steps through, eyes determined and axe already in his hand.

And Tommy's breath freezes in his lung as Dream steps through, mask tinted purple from the light of the portal.

"Well, Philza," says Quackity, smiling wide. "Are we going to do this the easy way or the hard way?"

"How about neither?" Phil answers, drawing his sword from his inventory.

Wraith summons their bow, the black-tipped arrow directed at Dream's mask.

“You tried to destroy my village,” they snarl, smoke pouring out from their mouth. “I will take revenge in the name of the Crimson Tribe.”

“My fight is not with you,” answers Dream, his mask facing Tommy, whose wings puff out defensively.

And then a firework detonates between the two groups, the bright red sparkles startling both parties into jumping back.

“Nah,” says Techno, stepping out from the trees, crossbow casually slung over his shoulder. His skull-boar mask is firmly in place, the shadows on its eye sockets flickering with the light coming from his enchanted netherite. “But anyone who tries to fuck with Philza goes through me.

Chapter End Notes

Big thanks to Malu in my Discord server for the help getting unstuck this chapter!

And to Cookie_Monster I say that your little tidbit of help is going to be revealed next chapter!!!

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Ranboo's breath remains caught in his lungs as the two sides stare each other down. His tail swishes side to side, his grip on his axe tight. He brought his armor, yes, but the axe he wields is made for chopping wood. It's not a battle-axe. He's not a fighter.

He *has* to fight, though. Quackity told him to but... he doesn't want to hurt anybody here.

"Dream, haven't seen you in a while," says Technoblade, acknowledging the masked man with a flick of his ear.

"This isn't personal, Techno," says Dream. Something about his casual tone when talking about possible murder rubs Ranboo the wrong way. "Just a conflict of interest. No hard feelings."

"Of course," answers Techno, switching the crossbow into his off-hand to summon his war-axe from his inventory. "I take it you're not giving up, Quackity? Can't you just leave 'em alone?"

"Not after everything you've done to L'Manburg," darkly states Quackity.

"So much for retirement," sighs Techno, his shoulders drooping. "Oh well."

He fires another firework, but the Butcher Army is quick to raise their shields, the sparks fizzling out harmlessly.

Ranboo's ears still ring from the noise, and he throws himself to the side as an arrow whizzes past him and narrowly misses both him and Fundy. He can see that Phil has a bow in his hands, face grim but set.

Fundy snarls and darts forward, forcing Phil to drop the bow and draw his sword once again.

The smashing of glass draws Ranboo's attention, and he sees the unknown Ghast hybrid with their arm outstretched. If the potion particles are any indication, they just threw a potion of swiftness at Tommy.

"RUN!" they scream at Tommy, before loading an arrow and shooting it at Quackity, whose sprint suddenly slows as dark blue particles begin wafting around him.

"I'll go after him!" Ranboo screams and starts sprinting through the frost-covered ground.

Even with a headstart and a potion of swiftness, it is troublingly easy to catch on to Tommy. His gait is uneven and he sways, the long dark cloak he's wearing getting caught under his feet.

"Wait!" Ranboo screams.

Tommy whirls around, swinging an honest-to-gods spear at him. Ranboo yelps, scrambling to a stop.

"I'm not going to hurt you!" Ranboo screams, throwing his hands up. "I'm not with them!"

"You're holding an axe!" Tommy replies, raising the spear once again to rest the tip of it against Ranboo's throat.

"Wait, what?" says Ranboo, before he realizes he is, in fact, holding an axe. "I'm so sorry, I forgot!"

He drops the axe into the snow.

"...Are you fucking serious?!?" says Tommy, though he does lower his spear a little. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm part of L'Manburg's cabinet as a minute man, and Quackity told me to put on my armor and come with him so I listened," Ranboo tells, his ears swiveled back so he can listen if anyone tries to sneak up on them. "That's not important."

"What is, then?" Tommy says, expression darkening.

"Are you okay?" asks Ranboo, taking a nervous step towards his... hopefully, his friend.

Tommy opens and closes his mouth a few times. "Are you seriously asking me that in the middle of a fight?!?"

"When else could I ask you?!? You disappeared!" Ranboo says, wilting when Tommy flinches. "I was worried about you."

"You were?" asks Tommy, lowering his spear completely. The mix of tentative hope and disbelieving surprise breaks Ranboo's heart a little. "You— you missed me?"

"I did, yeah," Ranboo says. "Tubbo did too."

Tommy lets out a shuddering exhale, bringing the spear close to his chest. Something inside the cloak Tommy's wearing shifts, catching Ranboo's attention.

"What's—" before Ranboo can finish his question a scream rings out from behind them.

Both turn to see Fundy clutching his face, a thin slash going over the bridge of his nose dripping blood onto his face. He doesn't seem to be too hurt, but the distraction is just enough for the Ghast hybrid to get a glancing blow to their shoulder from Quackity's axe.

The hybrid takes to the skies, quickly downing a health potion, and begins the barrage of arrows once more.

And in the middle of the clearing, Technoblade and Dream fight.

They are a whirlwind of flashing blades and graceful movements, the ease with which they battle taking Ranboo's breath away. Those two look like war gods clashing in the middle of the snowy tundra. Dream is all feline grace and quick, precise strikes to Techno's powerful slashes and brutal hits, neither giving ground in the slightest.

"We should go help," says Tommy, his shoulders tense.

"I feel like we would get in the way," says Ranboo, watching as Dream swings at Techno but misses, his axe instead cleaving cleanly through a tree.

The tree crackles and leans, Quackity and Fundy leaping out of the way to not get caught under. Phil isn't so lucky.

With an aborted flap of his wings, Phil is caught by the branches of the tree and brought down to the ground, pinned by the foliage. Fundy tries to lunge for the fallen fighter, but the Ghast-hybrid starts shooting arrows to keep him at bay.

Unfortunately, that means Quackity is free to focus on Techno instead, who under the onslaught of both of them begins to falter.

"Shit," Tommy hisses as Dream hits Techno with the upswing of his weapon right under the chin, before Techno is forced to throw himself to the left to dodge Quackity's slash. "Do you have a bow?"

"No," Ranboo says as Techno manages to trip Dream, only for Quackity to take the opportunity to yank Technoblade's hair hard enough to make him fall.

"Shit!" Tommy says, breaking out into a sprint towards the fight.

Ranboo tries to stop him, but his hands close around the air and not the cloak. "Tommy, wait!"

Techno rolls to his feet, back against a tree, and he summons his shield to parry the attacks. Blood is freely flowing down his chin and staining his armor red. Dream's axe impacts the wood, cracking through their defenses like a pickaxe through stone.

A cacophony of barks cuts through the struggle, the howls and snarling startling the fighters. All except Techno, who takes the distraction to smack Dream with his shield, forcing him back.

And with the force of an avalanche, white dogs flood the clearing. Quackity tries to flee, yellow wings snapping through his thin shirt and through the sides of his chestplate, but he's too late. His scream is drowned under snapping jaws, and Ranboo tears his eyes away once red starts to stain the white fur.

Dream stands his ground, batting away hounds with swings of his axe, and summons an ender pearl to his hand. He viciously kicks away a dog, before throwing the pearl through the trees and the darkness.

He faces their direction, and Ranboo freezes when the masks' dark beady eyes meet his own. "TOMMY, YOU—"

A black blur impacts right in the small gap between Dream's breastplate and shoulder guard, but his yell of pain gets cut off in a shower of purple particles.

Techno whirls to face him and Ranboo's ears violently fold as he takes a step back. He shrinks into himself, trying to make himself a little smaller but he's always been tall and lanky and—

Tommy steps forward between him and Techno, chin stubbornly set and spear at the ready.

Breath catches in Ranboo's throat, eyes watering. Even after Ranboo abandoned him to Dream, left him alone after letters telling him that he wasn't okay, Tommy would still risk his last life against Techno to protect him.

The pigling hybrid simply shifts his attention to Fundy, who is scrambling to hold on to a branch while a whirlpool of dogs yip at his ankles and tail. He whimpers, claws digging into the bark to keep himself from falling into the pile of wolves.

With a crack, Philza finally breaks free from the branches of the tree, standing up and ruffling his feathers to get rid of the snow on him. "You alright mate?"

"I'm fine," grunts Techno, wiping blood from under his chin, before pointing his crossbow at Fundy. "What do we do with him, though?"

Fundy snarls, ironically, like a cornered dog.

"I'm not going to kill my own grandson," sighs Philza, wings lowering dejectedly.

Techno grunts in affirmative, and with a sharp whistle calls the dogs to him.

"YOU KILLED MY DAD!" Claws flashing, Fundy lunges to pin Philza to the ground, sharp teeth a little too close to his throat for Ranboo's liking. "DON'T PRETEND TO BE A FUCKING SAINT NOW!"

"I HAD NO OTHER OPTION!" Philza struggles, wings wildly flapping against the ground. "HE HAD GONE INSANE!"

"YOU COULD HAVE KNOCKED HIM OUT!" screams Fundy, and there are tears in his eyes. "YOU COULD HAVE SAVED HIM!"

Philza stops struggling.

"You could have saved him, and you took him away from me," says Fundy, and he shakes with held-back sobs.

Techno grabs Fundy by the back of his armor and lifts him off Philza, setting him on the snow, where Fundy crumples to the ground.

“For Wilbur’s sake, I’m not goin’ to kill you,” says Techno to Fundy, but his eyes are still on Philza. “Just go.”

Fundy wipes the tears from his face and stands up, turning to leave.

“Wait!” shouts Philza, scrambling to his feet.

He turns, a wary set to his shoulders, posed to run off.

“I’ll bring him back,” promises Philza, hand over a heart pendant on his chest. “No matter what it takes.”

“... I’ll hold you to it,” says Fundy, before running off into the darkness.

“What are ya doin’ here?” says Techno, turning to look at Ranboo.

Ranboo startles so bad he *vwhoops*. “I– uh, I was peer pressured into joining,” he answers, nervously clicking his claws together while wishing he had a block of dirt to hold.

“Fair,” responds Techno. “You can go if you want.”

“I’m staying with Tommy,” Ranboo says, squaring his shoulders as best he can, tail instinctively drawing forward to curl along Tommy’s ankle.

“If you tell anyone where my house is, I’ll cut off your tongue,” states Techno, before turning and walking off.

“Oookay!” nervously answers Ranboo, before he follows Tommy to Techno’s house.

Tubbo curls up tighter into a corner of his cell. He snuffles but doesn’t let the tears fall as he tinkers with leftover copper shavings he had in his pocket to hopefully make a lockpick.

He’s in a set of underground jail cells, meant for holding the criminals of L’Manburg, that he had approved the building of as President.

And now he’s stuck there.

He tries to get himself more comfortable, but the bruises he got from Quackity’s axe twinge every time he shifts. He keeps reaching into his inventory, forgetting that he was forced to empty it.

The makeshift copper lockpick breaks.

Tubbo yells in frustration, throwing the useless pieces of metal at the wall. They clink to the ground.

“QUACKITY! QUACKITY LET ME OUT!” he yells, going over to the bars of the cell.

“QUACKITY!”

He kicks the bars of the prison, letting out a wordless yell that gets lost in the stone walls. He only gets echoes in response. His teeth grit, and he angrily wipes tears off his face.

“Tubbo?” comes a faint echo from a feminine voice he can’t recognize.

He startles, turning back to the bars.

“Who’s there?” Tubbo asks, waiting with bated breath.

“This way!” comes the echo, and two sets of footsteps bounce along the walls, getting closer.

“Who are you!?!” shouts Tubbo, taking a step back from the bars just in case.

The metallic clanging of armor gets closer until—

“Foolish?” he says, his ears perking up in surprise.

“Hi!” he answers, his sharky grin hidden by what looks like a shirt tied around his head.

Then steps out a sheep hybrid Tubbo doesn’t recognize, her mouth and nose covered with another shirt. Her colorful wool and pierced horns catch Tubbo’s attention.

But then battle instincts kick in and he notices the many recent small injuries and torn clothes under the armor.

“We’re getting you out of here,” the sheep hybrid says, hefting a pickaxe over her shoulder.

“These are obsidian bars,” says Tubbo, frowning. “It’s going to take ages.”

“Not for us!” says Foolish, before he closes his eyes. A soft, golden glow emanates from him and curls around both of them. Summoning his pickaxe, Foolish turns to the sheep hybrid. “I hit on one, you hit on three.”

“Alright,” she says, the golden glow settling over her like fireflies alighting on a field. “One! Two! Three!”

And with only two strikes from two pickaxes, the obsidian breaks.

“Holy-“ stammers Tubbo. “Are you both on steroids?!?”

“Godly steroids!” Foolish giggles, the glow slowly fading. “C’mon, we gotta get you to Tommy.”

“I’m Captain Puffy, it’s nice to meet you,” she says, tipping her armored pirate’s hat at him (so cool!) “Do you have anything to cover your mouth with?”

“Yeah,” says Tubbo, untying Tommy’s red bandana from his arm, instead tying it around his face. “Why though?”

“You’ll see,” says Puffy, extending her hand so Tubbo can use it to clamber out of the cell.

Steps suddenly begin echoing from deep within the prison, unhurried and many.

“Shit,” Puffy hisses. “We have to go *now*.”

“Follow me,” says Tubbo, taking point. “I designed this prison, I know another way out.”

He breaks into a run, keeping the strike of his hooves on the stone as quiet as he can. The map of the prison splays out in his mind’s eye. The emergency riot exit should be—

“Here,” says Tubbo, picking up a fallen stone on the ground and pressing it into a seemingly normal spot in the wall. It clicks, revealing it as a button, and the wall moves aside to reveal a hidden passage. “This will take us to an underwater exit.”

“Great, soggy wool,” half-heartedly complains Puffy, but she’s still the first one to step into the tunnel.

“What are you talking about, water’s great!” he says with a cheeky grin.

“Shush, you,” she says, mock kicking towards him. He laughs in response.

Whoever is following them starts singing. It’s a soft, melancholic lullaby spoken in a language that Tubbo can’t understand.

“Let’s get the fuck out of here,” Tubbo says, shoving Foolish into the passage before stepping inside and flicking a lever, slamming the wall closed.

They follow the tunnel in what Tubbo thought was going to be complete darkness, but as they head deeper crimson bloodvines break through the earth walls, casting a soft red glow.

“The vines didn’t use to glow,” says Tubbo with a frown, as the eerie tendrils grow thicker.

“How long have you been in the prison?” asks Puffy, turning to glance at him.

“Two, maybe three days?” he answers, a pit growing in his stomach.

“Holy Prime, they were fast!” gasps Foolish, ducking to avoid touching the hanging bloodvines.

“What? What are you talking about?” Tubbo asks, looking at both of them, eyes wide.

He’s so distracted that he stumbles over a vine growing out of the floor. And he lets out a choked yell as something curls around his ankle and yanks him until he falls.

“Tubbo!” Puffy screams, leaping over him to swing her axe at the vine attempting to wrap itself up Tubbo’s leg.

She slices the bloodvine, the cut tendril unwinding from Tubbo’s leg before thrashing wildly on the ground.

Tubbo scrambles to stand, watching with horror as the bloodvine still buried in the ground reaches for its cut piece and it reattaches itself.

The crimson vines all around them suddenly come to life and blindly flail, tangling themselves onto anything that moves

A yell makes Tubbo turn, as Foolish swings his axe down on a cluster of bloodvines trying to capture his arm, while Puffy yanks hard at some vines trying to grab onto her horns.

“RUN!” she screams, grabbing Tubbo’s wrist and charging ahead, cutting her way through the tangles of vines violently sprouting from the walls.

Their sprint gets slower and slower as more crimson clusters block their way, soon having to fight through the wiggling mass to only take a few steps.

“I’ve got this!” says Foolish, a frown of concentration on his face, before a golden wave bursts out from him and impacts the vines, all of them lit up by the soft glow, moving slowly as if through molasses. “Whatever these things are, they aren’t alive but they sure got a lot of willpower!”

“That’s creepy as *fuck*, ” says Tubbo, kicking at a vine getting a little too close for comfort while Foolish and Puffy clear the way.

Soon there is light coming through the tangle, each hit from the axes drawing them a little forward.

“Tubbo, *do not take off your bandana*, ” Puffy says and with one last heave, the remaining vines fall away. “And follow me, got it?”

“Sure, boss man!” Tubbo says, nerves alight and hands wishing to close around weapons he doesn’t have anymore.

“GO!” she screams, and all three of them burst through the tangle into a underwater cave, none of them even taking a second to pause. The water is murkier than Tubbo remembers, particles making it almost impossible to see what’s around him, but he’s lucky that he can still see the light of the surface.

Tubbo launches himself to the surface, taking greedy gulps of air before freezing, almost making Foolish crash into him, but he barely registers him talking.

L’Manburg is painted red with bloodvines, standing out over the now-gray lake like wounds on the landscape. A red haze has settled all over the city, thick enough that it could clog anyone’s throat, and despite it being midday, outside is as cold as the depths of the prison.

“What happened?” says Tubbo, watching what has become of his country.

“I don’t know, but we need to *move* if we ever want to find out,” says Puffy, sternly but not unkindly.

“Right,” Tubbo says, swallowing back his despair with practiced ease, and nods to her, quickly swimming for the shore and heaving himself back up.

The three of them break into a sprint once more, Tubbo quickly feeling suffocated by the bandana that was very much not meant to be worn wet, but he doesn’t want to find out what would happen to him if he took it off.

“Chicken on our left!” warns Foolish before said poultry attempts to peck Puffy’s eyes out, only to be speared on one of her horns.

Tubbo has a second to realize the chicken has vines growing out of its eyes before Puffy yanks it off her horn and throws it as far away as she can. The bird slowly gets back up, trying to get at them with a hole through its stomach.

“Keep going,” says Puffy, looking back as more livestock animals attempt to give chase. “We’re almost out!”

Even though his head spins with lack of oxygen, Tubbo keeps pushing himself until, little by little, the red fog breaks. They still run a few hundred blocks more, trying to put distance between them and the once-vibrant city-state.

Tubbo collapses to his knees, deeming it safe enough to take off his bandana to try and *breathe*.

“C’mon kiddo,” she says, offering her hand to help him stand. “We need to move if we want to get to the tundra before nightfall.”

He nods, trying to wipe off the dirt from his ruined suit. He chances a glance back, but all he can see is a red fog where his home should be.

Tubbo swallows his tears and follows Puffy and Foolish, wherever they will take him.

Chapter End Notes

I try to update at least once every month, but guess what! I broke my elbow!
My cast is already off, but trying to type one-handed was incredibly *infuriating*. That cause most of the delays.

But anyway, we are entering the Bloodvines arc of the story! It's the final arc, but it's a long one so don't worry.

Hope y'all enjoyed!

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Last night, after the whole fight, everybody was far too tired to do anything else than pick out a spot in the suddenly too-cramped house and conk out. But as soon the sun came out, Techno started regretting letting this many people inside his home

Starting with the fact that the Ghast hybrid and Phil have been stuck in a staring contest for the past few minutes over a sleeping Tommy. Phil's wings are ruffled, held half-open in a defensive spread while the half-Ghast barely blinks with red-tinged eyes.

"Mornin'," Techno says, skipping the last few rungs of the ladder and dropping himself to the floor.

That seems to snap both of them from the stare-off.

"Techno! Good morning!" Phil says in a forced cheery tone, finally standing from where he'd been sitting on the couch and walking over to the kitchen. "Let's go make breakfast!"

That is the most unsubtle 'let's talk privately' he's ever received. He still goes into his own kitchen and opens the cabinets. He'll make potato stew, he has enough of those to feed everyone in the cabin.

"Wraith won't let me *talk* to Tommy," whisper-yells Philza, pacing in the kitchen and just generally getting in the way. "Won't even let me get close! I'm the kid's father, for gods' sake!"

"You're both fighting over the traitor kid?" grumbles Techno, quickly chopping some garlic and throwing them into a pan to fry a little. "Lame."

"You don't— you don't *understand*," Philza says, peeking out from the kitchen's door to look at Wraith and Tommy before ducking back in. "Tommy was growing overdue *wings* and they would barely let me help!"

"He has wings?" Techno says, pausing to stare at his friend. "He's going to get *everywhere*, what a nightmare."

"*Techno*, this is serious," he says in his dad voice, wings bristling.

"Not to me, *Philza*," Techno says, a hint of a growl slipping through his words. "The kid tried to use me to make a government. I don't care what's going on with him."

Phil shuts his mouth, looking with such a hurt disappointment that guilt surfaces in Techno's chest. Techno takes that guilt and punts it to the deepest recesses of his brain.

DADZA IS CRAFTING A BELT! DADZA IS CRAFTING A BELT!

With a sigh, Techno goes back to peeling potatoes, doing his best to ignore the chanting his Chat has started up with. He ignores the fuming Philza beside him too, instead keeping an eye on the garlic while he chops vegetables.

At least Phil gets over his fit and puts a pot of water to boil.

“Uh, hi?”

Techno whirls around, pointing his knife at a wide-eyed enderman kid who startles back with a *vwwhoop!*

“Mate!” Phil says, clutching his chest, his wings a mess of poofed-up feathers. “Don’t scare me half to death!”

“Sorry,” the kid says, his ears folding back, his gaze dropping to the floor. “I– I didn’t mean to.”

“It’s okay,” Phil says, subtly clicking his sword back into its cane scabbard before walking over to the kid, cane thunking along the floor. “Wanna help us with the food?”

“Sure!” the kid says, walking over to the kitchen table while his tail swishes behind him. “So what do I do?”

Techno grumbles as Phil proceeds to adopt another kid. Again. He’ll get bored of the responsibility in a few years, find another pet project and then he’ll come back to see the little tyke all grown up and torn into *shreds* for being abandoned.

“What’d that carrot do to you, Techno?” says Phil, snapping the half-Piglin out of his musing.

“It’s an orphan,” Techno jokes, smiling as Phil lets out the bark of a laugh, but his smile drops as soon as the avian’s back is turned.

There’s a reason Techno keeps insisting Philza isn’t his father.

With a sigh, he turns back to the food.

Dream wakes with a gasp, coughing as he crawls away from his bed, falling to the dusty floor. His skin is raw, phantom trails of *agony* still crawling through his veins. He gulps in stale air, his harsh panting echoing back to him in the stone chamber.

With a heave, he pushes himself to the chest beside his bed and digs around for one of his spare masks, placing the cold porcelain on his face. He uses the sides of the chest to bring himself to his feet.

“ *THAT FUCKING GHAST!*” He punches the stone brick wall hard enough to crack it. He gives a wordless yell, kicking the chest so it spills its contents along the floor.

Dream yanks his sleeve back up his arm, looking at the three black tally marks on his wrist. One of them is greyed out, physical proof that he *died* . Because of one fucking arrow! A *withered-tipped* arrow. How the hell did they manage to do that?!?

He angrily unfolds his sleeve. He hasn't died once in his entire life, and now, *now* , when he can finally fulfill the purpose he was made Champion for, he's killed for such a petty fucking reason—

Dream forces himself to take a deep breath. Emotions are a weakness right now.

He knows his purpose: to kill that *godsdamned* Egg. Anything else is a distraction.

Tommy's face flashes through his mind, and a snarl stretches his lips. He was *so close* to remaking Tommy into something good, something *better*.

With a frustrated exhale, he walks out of the room and into the labyrinth halls of the Stronghold he's been using as a base for years now. The groans and grunts of zombies and the rattle of skeletons bounce through the walls.

His feet take him straight to the empty portal frame, and he sits on it, feet dangling over the lava. He misses the glimpse of the void of an activated portal, but rules are rules.

Instead, he thinks. A game of chess unfolds in his mind, the Egg with his possessed followers on one side, him on the other, his side a barren field. As much as he hates to admit it, he needs more pieces on his side. He can't defeat a fucking demigod on his own.

But then, genius strikes. There are more than a few pieces up for the taking, he only needs to ingratiate himself a little first. He'll even be able to continue his little pet project!

He heaves himself off the portal, instead turning back and into the Stronghold, his memory perfect as it leads him to the library. He'll have the entire thing cleared out, storing the books in his inventory, in less than an hour. Then, the first step of his plan can begin.

Fundy took one look at L'Manburg, the city covered in red spores and pulsing vines, and nopes the fuck out of there. Apparently, he didn't nope fast enough because he's now being followed by Purpled, with creepy red eyes and vines flowering out of his skin.

He's been chased for a day now, actually, which is *fucking bullshit*.

Fundy's faster than him, as a fox he's always been faster than most, but he can't keep running forever. The air's getting cold again and it burns his throat, he's starting to get hungry—

An arrow whizzes by, tearing a chunk of fur out of his tail. Fundy yelps and skids on wet grass. Of course, he'd get chased by fucking *Purpled*, of course! Why couldn't he get chased by someone who *isn't* a teenage mercenary?!?

But then something grips his ankle and he muffles a scream as he's yanked to the ground, slamming into the mud. He looks back; his leg is caught in a fucking snare.

“Shit!” he shouts, quickly accessing his inventory to draw his axe. An arrow sinks into his hand, making him scream and drop the axe.

With the graceful gait of a predator, Purpled steps out of the treeline, crossbow held in one of his hands. “The Egg will be happy to welcome you,” he says, a potion of weakness appearing in his hand.

Fundy scrambles back, hair on end, desperately yanking at the rope. He can’t move far enough.

“Not on my watch!”

Purpled turns, barely dodging a swipe from Puffy’s axe. He tries to load another arrow into the crossbow, but Puffy’s faster.

She hits him on the side of the head, knocking him out in one fell swoop. She even takes the potion of weakness from his limp hand and throws it for good measure.

“Thank— thank you,” he says, shakily standing up.

“You can thank me after we get to safety,” she says, slicing the snare in one smooth motion, then dropping her axe back into her inventory. “Coast is clear!”

Foolish peeks out from the foliage, smiling toothily. And after he steps out—

“Tubbo?!?” Fundy says, gaping at the horned teen cautiously standing back. “How are you here?”

“They rescued me,” he says, his long furry ears flicking nervously. “You’re not going to arrest me?”

“L’Manburg is gone, I... don’t really see the point anymore,” grimaces Fundy, his ears pinning back.

The last thing he had from his father is gone. No! He can’t think like that here, he can’t afford to break now. He can cry about it later.

“We’re going to the tundra, wanna come with?” asks Foolish, as cheerful as ever.

“Sure, but uh... please explain to Techno and Phil why I’m there?” Fundy says, sheepishly smiling. “Yesterday they told me to leave them alone.”

“Don’t worry Fundy,” Puffy says, smiling softly. “I’ll take care of that.”

Fundy’s tail wags a little. It’s been a while since he’s had someone on his corner.

“Come on, before any other eggheads find us,” she says, offering Fundy a hand so he can stand up. He takes it with a smile.

His smile turns into a baffled look once he sees Foolish using the ropes from the snare to tie Purpled up, and then into a sort of harness. Is he really planning to carry Purpled like a backpack all the way to the tundra— Foolish already put him on his back. Oookay.

The trip to the tundra is tense, all of them on the lookout for threats, but things are far too silent.

After hours of walking, they finally see the lights of a cabin in the distance. Fundy didn't expect the famed Blade to live in a cozy cabin.

They near the door, and he uses Puffy as a bit of a shield, hiding behind her once Technoblade himself opens the door.

Puffy simply stares at him with her back straight and defiance in her eyes.

"... fill my house with brats, sure, why not," he grumbles but still stands aside so they can enter.

They enter a cozy living room, with warm green couches and a fireplace merrily burning away. The only thing that breaks it is the boar mask resting over the mantel.

"Tommy?" says Tubbo, his voice tiny and wavering.

Fundy internally winces. Right, Tubbo hasn't seen Tommy since the day he exiled him.

Tubbo starts walking towards Tommy, slowly, carefully, as if he's a wild animal about to bolt.

Fundy didn't have much time to look at Tommy before, he was a bit busy fighting for his life.

Tommy blinks sleepily, yawning as his rusty red wings (*since when does he have wings???*) stretch behind him.

"Tubbo?" he mumbles, finally opening his eyes enough to see. "Tubbo!"

Like a shot, Tommy leaps from his makeshift cloth nest and engulfs the ram hybrid in a hug. Tubbo hesitates for a second but then melts into the embrace.

"You're okay?" says Tommy, drawing back from the hug to search his friend's face.

"I'm fine boss man, but what the hell happened to you?" Tubbo says, wide-eyed. "Wait, are your eyes *gold???*"

"It's a long fucking story that I don't wanna get into," he says, grimacing.

"So *you're* Tubbo," says a new voice, and Fundy turns to see the Ghast hybrid nearing all three of them. Their sclera is tinted a little red, which means they're angry, and Fundy's tail puffs up defensively.

"Wraith, stop that," Tommy says, swatting in their general direction.

“You need to lay down,” they answer instead. “You’re going to rip open a stitch.”

“Fiiiiine,” Tommy complains, tugging Tubbo over to his nest and affectionately curling around him, much to Tubbo’s bewilderment.

“I’m gonna— I’m gonna find something to eat,” says Fundy, suddenly feeling very out of place.

He turns towards the kitchen, padding quietly, and he peeks inside to see Techno washing dishes, while Phil tells a story to a spellbound Ranboo.

On second thought, he’ll go hungry for a little longer. He doesn’t want to go through the awkwardness of saying ‘hi Phil! Sorry for trying to kill you. What’s for lunch?’

Knock, knock, knock

Fundy pauses.

“Are we expecting anybody else?” He asks, but Techno is already walking towards the door, axe in hand.

“No,” Techno unnecessarily adds, before opening the door.

“Hello,” says Dream, hands in his pockets. “How does a truce sound?”

Chapter End Notes

Finals are kicking my entire ass. Dream is a conniving shit. What else is new?

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There is only a second of silence before the *thwack!* of an arrow impacts on a shield.

“That was kinda rude,” Dream says, lowering his shield and yanking the arrow out of the wood.

“That is the least you deserve, trespasser,” says Wraith, their voice tinged with an inhuman shriek.

Dream! Dream! Dream! chants Chat

“No fightin’ in the cabin,” Techno gruffly says, stepping forward to shield Dream from the literally fuming half-Ghast. “I trust this ain’t a ploy to get revenge for the death?”

Dream barks out a laugh, and leans over Techno’s shoulder to look at Wraith. “Nah, if anything I’m impressed. A wither arrow! How the hell did you manage that?”

Wraith’s glare turns confused. “Ah, thank you?” they say, obviously suspicious, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Techno already feels a headache begin to form behind his temples. People and their drama, why the fuck can’t they leave him alone?

“So, anyways. Can I come in?” he says, the mischief in his tone telling Techno that if he says no he’ll simply march through and make himself at home anyway.

Techno rolls his eyes and steps aside, letting the masked hunter stride through.

“Don’t you dare come any closer,” says Wraith, raising the crossbow once more.

“This isn’t your house, you can’t exactly tell me what to do,” Dream points out, amused.

“This isn’t your house either, homeless man,” Techno says, grinning as Dream splutters in outrage. But then his ears perk up, swiveling around in confusion. “Where’s Tommy?”

“None of your concern,” spits Wraith.

“Bruh, you’re kiddin’,” Techno says. “The damn kid will rob everythin’ in a second!”

“You’re worried over valuables when *he’s* here?” says Wraith, outraged, gesturing towards Dream.

“I don’t care what he’s done to you,” Techno says, flicking his ear in annoyance. “This is *my* house, so if I decide he gets to come in, you either suck it up or get out.”

Wraith exhales smoke, their sclera a stark red.

"Just— go make sure the gremlin isn't stealing anything," Techno grumbles. "What'd you want, Dream?"

"It'd be better if everybody was here, I have info that everybody should know," he says, ever the cryptic fucker.

Lore???? Technolore? Lore?

"Sure," he grunts, before typing a message in his comm for Philza to come back from feeding the wolves and bring Ranboo back with him. "Sit'n the sofa, I'll drag the rest here."

Techno turns his back to Dream, trusting that he at least will have the decency to listen, unlike *some* brats he knows. He focuses on his hearing, listening to the sound of voices in the basement. Well, the *normal* basement, not the one below that, so at least they hadn't been nosy.

He walks down the stairs, his hooves making heavy thunks on the stone, and he finds Wraith and Tommy deep in a discussion in— are they speaking fluent Piglish? He stops for a second, baffled at hearing his first language coming from a stranger and his kid broth— the kid Phil adopted, both of who have not a single drop of piglin blood in them. They're arguing about Dream and a Bastion, he thinks, before both of them abruptly cut themselves off when he notices them there.

"Uh, hi Techno?" says Tubbo, looking between Wraith and Tommy with a look that is half confused and... half hurt? Techno's never been the best with emotions and people, but he at least knows ear positions and their meanings. "What's up?"

"Dream wants to tell us somethin', got some info we'd like to hear supposedly," Techno replies.

"I'll go get Fundy," Tubbo says, before getting up and jogging past Techno.

"Look, at least listen' to what he has to say," Techno sighs, looking at the two left in the basement. "If anythin', I trust Dream to have good info."

Wraith seems likely to refuse out of spite, but Tommy says 'it's okay' in Piglish, shakily standing up. "We'll go."

His wings are all poofed up and he's shaking, which is strange, 'cuz he knows from Phil's wings that it means fear. Normally the kid would be angry at Dream being here, not scared— Ah. There's probably a better reason for the fear.

"Tommy, just put what you took back in to the chests and you'll be fine," says Techno, injecting a menacing rumble into his voice.

He looks confused for a second, but then his wings droop and he looks straight at Techno. "I haven't stolen anything in three months," he says.

There's a silence where Techno looks at the kid that used to beg him for stories and would rummage in his pack to take anything he could get his hands on, and wonders when the hell the kid changed into a stranger.

"Sure," Techno says, still somewhat suspicious because either the kid is telling the truth or he became a better liar and it rubs Techno the wrong way that he can't tell which one is more likely now.

Tommy walks upstairs, Wraith following behind with a hard look on their face. Techno awkwardly follows.

He stays for a second, keeping an eye on both Fundy and Tubbo who are dragging Techno's chairs from the kitchen so there's enough seating space, before climbing to the second floor of his cottage. He peeks his head out, finding where Puffy and Foolish are both sleeping on the floor, swaddled in their sleeping bags. He knocks on the floor to wake both of them up.

"Noooooooo," Foolish groans, burrowing deeper into the warmth.

"Get up, Dream's here and he wants to say something."

That seems to wake both of them up. They bolt up from their sleeping bags, crawling out of them in record time, which, weird, but hey Techno's got voices in his head. He can't judge.

Lore! Fooooooooolish! Papa Puffy's here! Let's go say hi to the homeless teletubby. Blood for the Blood God? Not yet dude.

Techno winces as his thoughts invited the voices to be louder, so he scrunches his face as he climbs back down.

While he's descending, he hears the front door open, Phil and Ranboo entering and quickly taking off their jackets and boots so they don't track snow all over the house.

"Hi mate!" Phil greets, shaking his wings free of snow outside the threshold. "Dogs are taken care of— Tommy, don't sit so close to the fire!"

"It's fucking freezing!" he shouts back, wrapped in a blanket and practically shoving his face into the chimney.

"We were in the Nether for months, leave him alone," says Wraith from *inside* the fire.

"Fine, but don't set the blanket on fire!" Phil shouts, before making his way to the couch. "Dream, hello!"

"Hi Phil," Dream answers, waving a hand in greeting.

Soon the footsteps of Foolish and Puffy approach, both clearly disheveled, but holding swords.

"Hello Puffy, Foolish," Dream says, and it's only the hours he's spent sparring against him that lets Techno know that Dream's shoulders raise with newfound tension. "Is everybody

here?"

"Yeah?" Ranboo says, tail lashing nervously behind him, stating a fact even though it sounds like a question. Bundle of nerves, that one.

"Good," he says, before folding his hands in front of him. "I suppose all of you have seen what happened to L'Manburg?"

"Yeah," says Tubbo, his soft words louder than a firework.

He sees a few sympathetic glances thrown Tubbo's way, but Techno only feels satisfaction that L'Manburg's gone.

"I know what did it," he says, drawing an old parchment from his inventory and unrolling it out for everyone to see.

There's a sketch of an egg, red, flowering vines blooming from its underside.

"The Egg, right?" says Phil, frowning at the drawing. "I'd heard some rumors about it decades ago."

"Yeah, well, it kind of went on a killing spree some decades ago," Dream says, passing the parchment so Phil can see it more closely. "After that, Exdeh told me to 'deal with it' and I forced it to make a deal. It agreed to, and I quote, 'Not hurt anybody ever again.'"

"Just a verbal agreement?" asks Techno, raising an eyebrow.

"No," Dream says, shaking his head. He raises his hand, a glow of green runes sparking in between his fingers. "I used a binding oath, one of Exdeh's powers since he's a god of order and all."

"So how did it do... all that?" asks Fundy, his tail winding closer to his legs, probably because of the memory of an overrun L'Manburg.

"A fucking loophole," Dream says, his hands tightening into fists and destroying the runes. "Mind-controlling people doesn't do damage, and since its orders are 'harmless', and it's the follower's decision to hurt others to fulfill those orders, the oath doesn't register that as a break."

"Wait, it's smart? Like, *smart* smart?" asks Puffy, sheep-ears raised in surprise.

"It's smart enough to try and be seen as mindless and be underestimated," points out Dream without turning to face her. "But anyways, it just wants to take over the Overworld. The thing about a creature like that though, is that it gets exponentially stronger the more it's taken before, and it can adapt. I fear that if it takes over the Greater SMP, it'll be powerful enough to take over the rest of the planet."

There is a stunned silence, only broken by the crackling of the fire, while the information sinks in. Techno's mind conjures visions of desolate red wastelands, colder than the Nether

and deadlier than it too. A deeper red. Mindless people wandering without a thought or a will.

"Well! That Egg sounds like a tyrant, that's enough for me," says Techno, "I'd welcome the aid if you're willin' to give it."

"No," declares Wraith, their red eyes looking rather demonic through the flames of the fireplace. "He is not coming with us."

"Look, I—" Fundy glances at Dream with a frown. "You haven't seen L'Manburg at all. It's— it's *gone*. I don't think we can afford to turn him away."

"And he's gotten better," says Tubbo, tentatively sending a small smile in Dream's direction, that he returns with a nod. His smile fades when he sees the horrified look that Tommy wears on his face. "Tommy?"

He opens his mouth to say something, but then he clicks it shut. "It's— it's nothing," he says, in a way that *clearly* means it's not nothing, but it's not Techno's business to pry.

"What if we solve this with a vote? Democracy and all that," says Techno, drawing the attention of everyone in the room. "All in favor?"

Phil, Techno, Fundy and Tubbo raise their hands.

"Against?"

Wraith, Tommy, and surprisingly, Foolish and Puffy raise their hands too. It's a tie, except—

"Ranboo, you gotta vote," rumbles Techno.

"I—" he says, his eyes flitting between everybody in the room. "I—"

He then winces, rubbing a hand on his forehead as if he had a headache. For a second, Techno thought his green eye could have been glowing, but then Ranboo blinks and shakes his head.

"I'm sorry, I can't decide," he says, his shoulders drooping, putting his tail between his hands and fidgeting with it.

"We're kinda at an impasse, mate," points out Phil, a concerned frown on his face.

"I believe I can break it," Dream says, pulling out stacks upon stacks of books from his inventory and laying them on the ground. "These are all books I took from an underground, ancient Stronghold. They *may* have the answer to beating the Egg. But if that isn't enough..."

Dream pulls one last book out of his inventory, and the atmosphere in the room abruptly changes.

The book reminds Techno of Totems of Undying, only instead of touching the thing to feel its aura, it effortlessly bleeds into the air. It has the same discordant resonance of magic, both

Death and Life forcefully trapped in a single vessel, like opposite poles of a magnet forced together.

"That's a Resurrection Book!" cries Foolish, walking forward to look at it more closely. "How did you get one? I thought Eret and I had destroyed all of them decades ago!"

"Schlatt happened to have one spare, and thought it would be enough to make sure I didn't fight against him with Pogtopia," Dream says, a grin evident in his voice as he returns the book back into his inventory. "How about this? I get your help fighting against the Egg, and I'll use this book to get Wilbur back."

Philza gasps, then turns to look at those that voted against, and Ranboo, with naked desperation in his eyes.

"Please," he says, his voice breaking.

"...Let him stay," says Tommy softly, with eyes closed and the voice of someone who has signed their death warrant.

"Tommy—!" says Wraith, coming out of the flames to reach towards him.

"Wraith, don't," says Tommy, his wings raising along with his shoulders. "Not now."

"...Alright," they say, instead sitting beside him and leaning their weight into him comfortingly.

"Great!" Dream says, clapping his hands once to distract everybody from whatever *that* was. "These books are either in Ancient Villager, Ender, Galactic or Ancient Piglish. Does anybody know any of them? I kinda know Ender, but I'm not completely fluent in it. It would take me a while to translate them."

"I know Galactic!" says Phil, immediately reaching toward the first book to rifle through its pages, putting it aside since apparently, it's in Ender.

He keeps rifling through the books, while Dream says: "Good, anyone else?"

"I know Ender. I think," says Ranboo, picking the book Phil discarded to open the first few pages. "Yeah! I know it! Well, most of it."

"We'll work together then," says Dream.

"I know Piglish, but not the Ancient kind," Techno says, frowning at the books. "I might be able to cobble things together."

"I do not know Ancient Piglish, though I do know the modern version of it," says Wraith, though there's an uncomfortable furrow to their mouth, as if their words taste bitter. "I... do know Ancient Villager."

"Wait, what?" says Tommy, looking with wide eyes at Wraith. "Since when?"

"I'll tell you that story later, you do have a right to it," says Wraith, taking Tommy's hand in theirs and squeezing gently. They then turn to address the rest of the room. "We, however, are accepted by the Piglin Tribes. It would be simple to take a trip to the Tribe and find someone who can read the language."

"And I can read Ancient Villager too!" says Foolish, grinning toothily. "So you both can take a trip to the Tribes while I translate the Villager books!"

"I don't feel comfortable letting you two make the trip on your own," says Phil. Techno rolls his eyes. Perfect timing to play the concerned father! Not.

"The Tribe won't allow any outsiders into it," rebukes Wraith, glaring at the avian.

"Then I'll go," huffs Techno, wanting the argument to be over. "I'm half-Piglin, not an outsider technically."

There's a flash of anger on the Ghast hybrid's face, before a mask of calm falls over it. A calculating look surfaces in their eyes, one that Techno isn't sure that he likes, but it is then wiped from them so fast he thinks he imagined it. Could be his paranoia, he supposes.

"Very well. We will leave tomorrow morning. Today we should sort the books," they answer.

That seems to shelve the argument, a system for sorting quickly being set up. There's a crash course on how to identify each language, and soon the only sound is people opening books and closing them again.

Even with nine people sorting there are so many books that it'll take the entire rest of the day to sort them, Techno can tell.

The day dawns cold as shit, but since leaving the Nether *everything* is cold as shit.

Tommy grumpily burrows into the heavy winter jacket, one of Phil's, since it actually has wing slits in the back. He keeps tugging the sleeves down, the edges of them at his forearm since Phil's so short, but Tommy's a twig so the jacket is *also* too wide.

"Wraaaaaaith, can we go now?" Tommy says, shoving his gloved hands into his pockets, wincing when his newly-grown talons tear holes through the tips of the gloves.

"Yes," they say, finally closing the door. They disappear one last book into their inventory to join the almost three stacks of books in Ancient Piglish.

Techno grunts, starting to walk ahead in the direction of the portal. Tommy follows, quietly complaining about the cold and the snow. He's pretty jealous of Wraith right now, who simply hovers above the snow.

Still, the portal isn't *that* far. It doesn't take long for it to appear and Tommy runs ahead, jumping into the swirling purple with a happy shout. The particles of the portal finally clear to reveal the netherrack and flowing lava, smacking Tommy in the face with a wave of stifling heat.

He quickly pulls the winter clothes into his inventory, spreading his wings and smiling at the comforting warmth.

He turns to look at the portal as it gurgles, Techno stepping through and then Wraith. They place a chest down, stuffing their borrowed winter clothes into it.

“Tommy, could you put your stuff in here?” says Wraith, taking care to word it like a question and not a demand, which brings a smile to Tommy’s face. “It frees up inventory.”

“Good idea!” he says and does as told, much to Techno’s surprise. Yeah, he can be responsible and mature, bitch. Winter things stowed away, they begin the long trek to the First Bastion.

The trip is boring, but if Tommy’s honest he’ll say that he spent most of it looking at Techno. He’s always known that Techno was born and spent his childhood in the Nether, but he wasn’t truly aware of it until now. He moves with the same grace as the piglin warriors, navigating the terrain with the confidence of the foragers.

‘Why did Techno ever leave the Nether?’ Tommy wonders. ‘He looks right at home.’

Soon the mouth of the netherrack cavern comes into view, all three of them nearing the entrance and walking into the dark corridor.

Two guards step out to meet them, bearing newly-forged iron spears. The iron was courtesy of Wraith, the forging courtesy of Tommy. He can’t help but do a little excited hand-flap at the thought that the Tribe is using his weapons.

Wraith floats forward, face stony, and speaks in clear Piglish: “ *Tell the Tribes that Wraith and Tommy have brought Vead back.* ”

Techno startles, the two guards nodding before one of them turns and sprints down the tunnel.

“How’d you know my old name?” he says, looking bewildered at Wraith.

They huff out a sardonic laugh, glancing at him before floating ahead. “I was hoping you hadn’t forgotten me, but it seems that was too much to ask.”

“Heh?” he says, walking faster to stand beside them. “We knew each other?”

“You were my *first* friend in the Tribe,” they say, a nostalgic smile on their face. “You tried to teach me how to fight, but I wasn’t piglin, I was too frail for that kind of fighting.”

“I taught you how to brew potions, and then how to open a Nether portal.” But then their smile falls. “You left for the Overworld. And guess who the Tribe blamed for that?”

He looks wide-eyed at the Ghast-hybrid, the rising light revealing the details of his bewildered expression.

“I was without family at that point,” they say, gaze held forward as the First Bastion comes into view. “And I desperately wanted to belong to the Tribe. Your leaving *shattered* that for me, but you’ve always hated orphans, haven’t you?”

Techno finally notices the piglins surrounding him, all armed, all tense, leading them towards the central courtyard of the Bastion.

Tommy is looking at Wraith, feeling like the rug was yanked from under him. “Wraith? What is going on?”

Finally they turn to look, a soft look appearing on their face.

“*Don’t worry, Tommy,*” Wraith says, taking his hand into theirs. “*I’ll tell you everything before the Trial.*”

“What trial?!?” Techno says, looking bewildered as they finally enter the courtyard, gaping at the sheer amount of piglins surrounding him, with the different colors of the different Tribes.

“*Yours,*” says Matee, Voice of the Crimson Tribe.

Chapter End Notes

Latenightfangirl, I see your bookmarks and I appreciate them!

But yeah. We're getting Techno and Wraith backstory next chapter!!!

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy thought for a second that Techno would run, try to fight an entire Bastion by himself, but even he knows that's stupid. This isn't even a typical Bastion, at least three times the number of Brutes ready to attack, and that's without counting the rest of the piglins.

He's led down into the holding cells, guards flanking him and not surfacing. He's getting a permanent surveillance squad, which clues Tommy about how trusted he actually was when he and Wraith were left alone in the cells.

"*Wraith*—" Tommy says, turning to look at them.

"*Sit*," they say, gesturing towards a few cushions on the ground. Lethi and Neethel are close behind, dragging their own cushions and setting them down.

Tommy sits, but he certainly can't sit *still*, he's vibrating in his seat and he instinctively knows his wings are all poofed up in impatience.

"*I did never tell you my story, despite the fact that I heard yours*," they sigh, their head-tentacles drooping.

"*You want to tell me about it? Or have to?*" says Tommy, fearing that Wraith's sense of duty is pushing them to do this

"*Want*," they say, before taking a deep breath. "*I assure you of that.*"

"*I never knew who bore or sired me. All I know was that I was left behind in a village, and the villagers took me in. After I followed the Cleric while asking questions about potions for the better part of a month, I became an apprentice to the village potioneer.*"

Their eyes then unfocus slightly, if they're sunk into memories or 'spectating', Tommy can't tell.

"*I was twelve when a human came into the village, reeking of Pillager magic. A Raid came after, and when the human saw it couldn't beat the raid alone, they left. I hid in the lava of a nearby ruined portal. When I got the courage to go back to the village, there was nobody left.*"

Tommy doesn't dare breathe, staring at Wraith. Neethel loops his tail around Wraith's wrist, but they don't seem to register the feeling.

"*I know I spent time in the village alone, but I don't remember most of it. All I remember is finding a picture of a complete Nether Portal in a book and getting the urge to leave and never come back, so I did.*"

The temperature of the Nether didn't make up enough for how difficult it is to find food. It was just as bad as living in my empty village... until I met Vead. Or Techno, as you know him now.

He was the only one of the Piglins to dare talk to me. We were both outsiders, in a sense. I was not piglin, he was not fully piglin. He didn't care about getting into trouble with the Elders by letting me into the village and teaching me the language. It took a while, but eventually, the Tribe started warming up to me. It--

Wraith takes a deep breath, their eyes shiny with unshed tears.

"Turns out he didn't want to be my friend. He was using me to learn Common and how to build a Nether portal, and as soon as he could, he left. He didn't even say goodbye.

He didn't even care that because of his actions I was declared an enemy of the Tribe for years," Wraith says, fists tight and sclera slowly turning red. *"He never cared that he made me lose my home for a second time."*

"I..." Wraith hesitates, pursing their lips before they lower the hem of their leather tunic, to show three tally marks, one of them greyed out. *"After I was... outcasted from the Tribe, I tried to keep going. But the loneliness got to me."*

Tommy's eyes widen, cold suddenly coursing through his veins.

Wraith takes a deep breath, their trembling exhale tinged with soot. *"I brewed two potions of harm. And then I drank both of them."*

"Oh," is all Tommy can say, dumbly.

"You know the worst part?" says Wraith, a bittersweet smile on their face. *"I didn't know I had multiple lives. I was raised by villagers, I only ever thought I had one. So when I took those potions and woke back up in my own bed, I thought it had been a dream. It wasn't until years later that I talked to Neethel and realized I had succeeded in taking one of my lives."*

Tommy gapes numbly, before his head kicks into gear. *"Neethel knew how to handle me wanting to jump into lava because of you,"* he blurts out.

"You tried to kill yourself again?" asks Wraith, cautiously concerned.

"I- uh," Tommy stammers.

"You don't have to tell me if you don't want to," they say, looking with soft eyes at him. *"But if you ever do, just know I understand. Maybe not exactly, but certainly close enough."*

"I don't want to bother you," Tommy says, looking at the ground.

"A bother? Tommy, you could never bother me," Wraith says, gently taking his hands once again. Tommy looks up at their face, seeing so much fondness in those eyes that he doesn't know what to do with it. *"You gave me a home. Did you never realize how much you helped in getting the Tribe to trust me? Are you blind to how much everyone here loves you?"*

That's Tommy's breaking point, as tears start running down his face. Slowly, like a frightened animal that could bolt at any moment, Tommy hugs Wraith. They wind their arms around him, their netherborn heritage making them so warm, and hold them close.

"We have a home now," Wraith says, pulling Tommy back so they can look at their face. *"We don't ever have to leave. Dream can deal with the Egg alone. We'll be fine over here."*

"What?" Tommy says, his face falling. *"No! We can't leave them alone, Wraith. They're my friends!"*

"They left you alone with that monster!" Wraith says, baffled and pleading. *"How do you call them your friends after they betrayed you?!?"*

"You still call the Tribe your home after they kicked you out!" Tommy says, but immediately wishes he could take those words back.

"That's— that's different!" Wraith says, taken aback. *"We're here, aren't we? They let me back!"*

"And I won't know if they'll let me back if the whole world is destroyed by that stupid Egg!" Tommy shouts, rearing back.

There is tense silence between them. Tommy is *terrified*, memories of how his relationship with Wilbur started going downhill when the arguments started. He can't do that again. *Please*, if any deities are listening, Prime, Death, anyone, please. Don't let it happen again.

"You're far too forgiving for your own good," says Wraith, frustrated, but there are tears in the corners of their eyes.

"I know," he answers.

The tense silence is broken by the hurried footsteps of an elder Piglin, walking towards them as fast as his cane will allow. Tommy blinks as he recognizes the Elder of Warped Tribe, the same one that gave him the drink that made him think he was a prince for a while.

"Wraith, Tommy, did you talk about an Egg that is going to destroy the world?" he says, stern and sharp-eyed.

"Yes? It kinda took over my home city," Tommy says, tense. He definitely was being too loud again.

"Follow me," he says, and then turns to walk with urgency toward the bastion's library.

Both turn to look at each other, confused, before following.

Piglin typically don't keep many books, Tommy knows that. The library doubles as an enchanting area, with the books being actual readable books instead of the indecipherable, rune-filled tomes humans use for enchanting.

The table in the middle of the room is big enough to seat four people, but it is a little big for the space they're in, especially since they can't block the enchanting table's access to the books.

As all three of them sit at the table, Tommy notices the pile of books they brought from the library on it, some of them open into specific pages, leather scrolls beside them left mid-translation.

"There is a story, passed down acolyte to acolyte," the Elder begins, straight to the point. "Of when the Dragon Queen attempted to take the divinity of Exdeh, god of order."

"Dragon?!? They're real?!?" Tommy says, looking wide-eyed at the Elder, who nods in response.

"In response to such blasphemy, the End, the home-dimension of the endermen, was closed forever, trapping the Dragon Queen inside and cutting the connection the endermen had to the hivemind. That's the reason why we have the Ender language, but endermen themselves are not capable of thought; their minds were made to be connected, but without connection, they do not work right."

The Elder rifles through the leather-scrolls the Piglin use as books, unrolling one of them to show a drawing of the Egg. The scroll looks ancient. How old is this thing?

"Her strategy to take Exdeh's divinity involved another god," the Elder continues. "She had stolen a piece of the Blood God's power, and placed it into one of her eggs. However, the plan was thwarted before the child could hatch. Exdeh cursed the resulting egg to never be born."

"That's what the Egg is?" says Wraith, sounding faint. *"The unborn demigod child of the Dragon Queen and the Blood God?"*

"Oh shit," says Tommy in Common. "OH FUCK."

"And the gods expect us to fight that?!?" says Wraith, tentacles flaring behind their head. *"The gods expect **you** to fight that?!?"*

Tommy flinches. He's used to being told he's weak, but it still hurts. But once he gets past his knee-jerk reaction, he thinks and... yeah. Compared to an actual demigod, anyone would be weak.

"We do know that the Egg has one weakness," the Elder continues, pointing to a drawing of a blue flame. *"Soul Fire. But that's all we know."*

"But how can we cure someone that's been infected?" Tommy says, frowning.

"The Egg being able to infect people is something new, but knowing its properties..." the Elder looks at him with sympathy, and it makes Tommy's skin prickle. *"The only way would be to burn the infected's body completely with soul fire. If not, the vines will remain even after respawn."*

“Oh,” Tommy says, swallowing. So the only way to save his friends... is to take a life from them. He tries to imagine killing Niki, and the thought makes him physically ill. Staying in the Bastion is starting to feel like the right decision.

A call sounds in the distance, and Tommy recognizes the Voice of the Tribe calling for a council.

“ *We should go,* ” says Wraith, nodding respectfully at the Elder.

Tommy nods too and follows silently behind them.

They head to the courtyard, all levels of it full of piglin waiting for the trial of the tribe traitor. Technoblade is in the middle of it, hands bound with chains.

Memories of Tommy being in that same position flood back at him, as distorted and hazy as they are. He wasn't at all present that time, just waiting to be killed.

Now he's very present, almost unbearably so. He can hear the murmurs of his tribe-mates whispering to each other, the guards pointing crossbows and standing at the ready, the nervous flicking of Techno's ears.

He's probably the only one who can tell Techno's nervous. The knowledge of that slaps him in the face.

Lethi calls for silence by slamming a staff onto the ground, and the sudden lack of sound is deafening. Matee, Voice of the Tribe walks forward, head held high and expression stern.

“*Vead of the Crimson Tribe,*” she begins, her wizened old face held in a disapproving frown. “*You left the Tribe holding the title of Warrior. You forced a child of the tribe to stay in the same house as his abuser. It is uncertain which crime is worse.*”

“ *Wait, abuser? Dream?* ” says Techno, looking bewildered.

Tommy's breath catches in his throat. Is it better or worse if he didn't know? He can't tell. Would it be crueler if he did it on purpose, or just didn't care enough to put two and two together?

“ *As it is customary,* ” says Matee, completely ignoring Techno's words. “ *You will have the chance to tell your story. To tell your truth. You have the word, now.* ”

Techno hesitates. His red eyes darting from Piglin to Piglin, crimson meeting grey. But then he catches Tommy's eyes, holds his gaze for a second. He doesn't know what Techno sees in them, but he takes a deep breath and speaks. Techno never liked to speak of his past, always dodging with some deadpan joke that made Tommy laugh or splutter in outrage.

But, he speaks of a childhood with the Tribe, only saying that he felt he didn't fit in. That there was a better place for him, the weird half-blood. He only starts speaking in earnest about his wandering in the Overworld and... and being captured by a gladiator ring. He speaks of killing and killing and killing, and how the voices of the cheering audience never left him.

It was Phil who saved him, not physically, but mentally, sneaking into the jails to remind him that there was more to life and the Overworld than chains and starvation.

How one night he prayed to the Blood God, and awoke with blood red eyes and the knowledge that as long he spills enough blood, even axes will shatter on his skin.

He murdered the entire audience of his next fight, including the king of the empire he was in.

Obviously he was on the run after that, and very lost in a world that was so alien to him.

As the Champion of the God of Chaos, his mission was to topple empires, to destroy order, and that is what he did. The story starts getting more familiar to Tommy; staying with Phil and adventures that took months, then being called by Wilbur and watching as a nation corrupted the people he knew.

Tommy looks at his... calling him brother doesn't feel right anymore. He thought he knew Techno, but almost all of this is news to him.

"Why did you let this child suffer under your care?" asks Matee, stern, eyes narrowed.

"I didn't know," Techno says, and Tommy can tell he's being honest.

Murmurs spread through the crowd, debating how valid that excuse is.

"I actually didn't know!" he says, crossing his arms defensively. Or at least trying to, since he's got them shackled. *"It's not my responsibility to take care of him, he got into this mess on his own."*

Tommy doesn't know whether to laugh, or cry, or scream, or do— do *anything* . Because he's right, because he did fuck up so many times, pissed of the wrong person, didn't stop following when Wil went off the deep end.

But, there's one little voice that has been growing inside him, one that sounds like Wraith, and Lethi and Neethel and Anala and the Piglins of the Tribe, who look at him like he has worth.

And he feels *angry* .

"He was starving me, taking everything I managed to get for myself and keeping me trapped and alone!"

"I didn't know that!" Techno screams. "You didn't tell me!"

"I WOULD HAVE IF THE FIRST THING YOU DID IN EXILE WASN'T LAUGHING AT ME!" Tommy shouts, and he can feel tears burning at the corners of his eyes.

Techno shuts his mouth with a click, his ears startled, his eyes wide.

"I wanted to die, Techno," he says, the words falling from his mouth, the torrent of truth he doesn't know how to stop. "And he wouldn't let me, because he'd rather see me suffer than

die."

"Before you say that you didn't know that either," says the soft but deathly even voice of Wraith. "You know that Dream had already killed him twice, and still allowed him to stay in exile and in your house, even daring to threaten to kick both of us out into a barren, infected world of crimson."

As Wraith carefully translates their conversation, for the first time in a while, he can see a dawning comprehension in Techno's eyes. A spark of hope lights in Tommy's chest that he squashes. He won't dare to hope for Techno to what— apologize? Kick Dream out?

" *Tribes of the Nether* ," says Matee, her voice projecting all over the courtyard. " *Do we judge Technoblade guilty of contributing to the abuse and neglect of a child of our tribe?* "

Thousands of hooves strike the stone floor of the courtyard, with unanimous assent.

" *Anyone against?* "

There are no voices that rise to contradict that verdict, not even Techno's himself.

" *Good,* " Matee says. " *Now, for your second crime.* "

" *I was running away! What did you want me to do, drop by and say 'by the way, I'm leaving! Don't want to be your Warrior anymore, okay? ByeEEEEEEEE.* '"

" *Yes,* " Matee says, looking absolutely done with Techno's disrespect. " *Do you think we are so cruel as to not allow someone to leave, if they wish to? A simple reason why, and all this hurt could have been avoided.* "

Techno's gaze breaks from Matee's, gritting his teeth before the honesty is ripped from his mouth: " *I don't think I could have faced you, back then.* "

" *And for your cowardice, innocents suffered,* " she says, unsympathetic. " *Now, to the matter at hand.* "

She faces the Piglins gathered, and raises her voice. " *What punishment should be in store?* "

Everybody is looking at Tommy, now. It is the right of the hurt party to be the first to suggest a punishment. He opens his mouth, but clicks it shut.

He looks down to the person he'd looked up to for most of his life, now bound in chains and at his mercy. He should be victorious, or maybe angry, but all he can think of is how similar this must feel to being back in a coliseum to Techno.

For a second, he thinks about avenging Tubbo in a way that he couldn't back in the Pit. Of making his punishment getting shot point-blank with a rocket launcher.

But that's not who he wants to be. Not anymore. So he keeps quiet.

“ He is a hybrid, is he not? ” says Lethi, looking at Techno with an even disposition. “ Passing the title of Champion can only be done by death or apprenticeship. Losing a life is not the end of his existence, and death is death, regardless if he comes back or not. I’d wager an execution is enough. ”

There are murmurs of assent throughout the crowd, and Tommy gulps.

Techno’s back straightens, and he almost seems confident. In a twisted way, maybe he is. Fighting for his life must be familiar to him.

There’s a glint of gold in Techno’s hand, and Tommy blinks. Why gold?

“ Stop, ” says the steady voice of the Warped Elder, walking into the center of the courtyard, his walking stick clicking with his steps.

The golden object disappears from his hand, and Techno looks at the elder with a perfect poker face, aka his regular expression.

The elder’s cane glows with runes, and quick as a viper lashes out towards Techno. The Champion of the Blood God dodges easily, but he was not the target.

The cane pierces through reality, the tip disappearing from view in a crack in the air. It emerges in a shower of glowing cyan runes with a Totem of Undying hooked on the tip.

“ ... before anyone says anything, I didn’t make it, I stole it from the Pillagers who did, ” Techno hurries to explain.

“ Good. Do not meddle with resurrection without the guidance of Death and Life, ” the elder says, before taking the Totem and setting it a distance away, out of Techno’s reach. *“ And do not attempt to cheat punishment fairly decided. ”*

“ Who is in favor of executing Technoblade? ” says Matee.

There is a majority stomping their hooves, but is nowhere near unanimous.

“ If there aren’t any other voices— ”

Techno is frozen in the middle, ears pinned to the sides of his head. He is staring at the ground unblinkingly, hands shaking.

“ Wait, ” Tommy says, the eyes of the Tribe on him but he only has eyes for Techno. He’s never seen Techno afraid before, and there’s something so *wrong* about it, and he’s watching the image of his older, unbeatable, brave brother is shattering before him.

“ What if he becomes Lethi’s mentor? ” Tommy suggests, looking away from Techno and addressing the Tribes.

There are interested murmurs in the crowd, people remembering his prowess even as a young child.

“ Lethi, would you be willing?” questions Matee.

“ If he promises not to run away,” says Lethi. There are a few laughs in the crowd.

“ Is that truly what you want?” asks Matee.

“ ...I’m tired of watching people die,” Tommy says.

“ Those in favor?”

It was not wholly unanimous, but it had more people going for it than a straight-up execution.

“ Very well then,” says Matee, nodding towards the crowd. *“ The Warped Elder will take your vow now.”*

Tommy isn’t listening anymore, but he watches Techno swear to train Lethi, green-glowing runes sealing the deal with magic.

He doesn’t know what to feel, or what to do, anymore.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was hard to write. Not because of anything dealing with the writing itself, but because when Techno/Alex died, the only thing missing from this chapter was the trial scene at the end.

For months, it had been planned for Techno the character to lose a life in that trial. I couldn't make myself write that. And for a while, I couldn't even write either this story or Achilles, Come Down, simply because Techno was there.

But in the end, I've finally got the strength to do it. And I'm dedicating this story to him. The character he created in the SMP is a wonderful mix of flawed and mythical, of his own personality and a persona he created, and I'm trying to reflect that here.

Technoblade never dies. Take care of yourselves, everyone.

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wraith and Tommy spend a couple of days catching up with the people in the Bastion and waiting for a few books to be translated.

At least it's a productive couple of days, Wraith muses, quickly checking on the ridiculous amount of regeneration potions they are brewing before going back to trying to juice a golden apple.

They've managed to finish a new Nether-proof greenhouse and teach a few Piglins how to correctly harvest and plant the Overworld produce, write down all the recipes for the potions that use Overworld ingredients, set a frankly ridiculous quantity of spider's eye to ferment, dropped two stacks of iron blocks at the forge (ignoring Tommy who was forging there at the moment), helped expand the Bastion enough that the Crimson Tribe can comfortably fit inside, managed to make a dozen arrows of decay with a wither skull they traded with the Wither Tribe, and single-handedly replenished the entire Bastion's *and* the Crimson Tribe's potion reserves.

They're only missing the few last batches of regeneration potions, their eyes still aching a little from how much they've had to cry to get enough Ghastr Tears for it. (If crying came easier now, it's their own business and nobody else's.)

They've even had the time to get a little experimenting in, like now, as they combine weakness potion and the enchanted apple juice in different ratios, labeling them and placing them on a shelf.

With a smile, Wraith looks proudly at their work before their smile dims. They have no more reason to stay in the Bastion. They don't want to go, but they can't leave Tommy to his fate. So Wraith sucks it up, glides towards the brewing potions and starts bottling them with an efficiency born of multiple years of practice. Soon, their work is done.

With determination coloring their movements, Wraith exits the potions lab they made and heads towards the infirmary, a couple meters down the corridor.

" *You're done already?* " Neethel says, wiping his hooves on a towel before hopping to sit on a table, as Wraith pulls freshly-made potions from their inventory. " *You're getting fast!* "

" *Why thank you,* " Wraith says, an impish smile on their face, before their face turns a little more serious. " *I only need to pack now. We'd be leaving in a few hours.* "

" *You know, I'm gonna miss ya,* " Neethel says, softly headbutting Wraith's shoulder. " *I would go with you, but...* "

Wraith grimaces. The Overworld sickness pops into their mind, hundreds and hundreds of zombified piglins surfacing through their memories. They'd even gotten the news that one of the piglets in the Crimson Tribe, a little ball of sunshine with one broken tusk, had fallen ill and zombified before the healers could do anything. The possibility of that happening to Neethel opens a pit of dread in Wraith's stomach, and they shake the thought away.

" *Stay safe, okay?* " Neethel says, putting a hoof on their shoulder. " *And kick that demigod's ass for me .* "

" *I will,* " Wraith says, hesitating for a second before engulfing Neethel in a hug.

Neethel chuffs affectionately, and the corners of Wraith's mouth twitch upward when they hear the tell-tale sound the wagging of a piglin tail.

Wraith steps back, laughing when they see Neethel's ears flapping excitedly.

" *Neethel! We have a patient that fell into lava!* " the Head Healer shouts from the other side of the infirmary, and Neethel curses before dashing in that direction.

" *SORRYFORLEAVINGGOODLUCKWITHYOURJOURNEYBYE !* " Neethel shouts, before disappearing behind the cloth partition, his hurried hoofsteps fading.

Wraith shakes their head fondly, and turns towards their tent to go pack.

Tommy jogs back towards the Bastion, inventory full of soul sand. Lethi trots beside him, carrying a woven basket also full of the stuff while at the same time carrying his heavy-ass hammer like it's nothing. Techno is following them a few paces behind, his inventory also full, for once not wearing his cape.

" *—was stupid difficult, let me tell ya ,* " Tommy rambles, hopping over jagged netherrack stones. " *But I think it'll be worth it. I mean, if I can be the first to make obsidian weapons that'd be so fucking cool!* "

" *Wouldn't they be very heavy?* " Lethi says, tilting their head.

" *I mean sure ,* " Tommy says, turning around and walking backwards. " *But! There was some info about potions and weapons forging that they found in the Stronghold books that —* "

"Tommy, lower your voice one second," Techno says gruffly.

" *Speak in Piglish!* " singsongs Tommy, inordinately pleased that after months of only being able to speak that language, he can now inflict the same annoyance on someone else.

Techno sighs, before repeating. " *Tommy, lower your voice for a second.* "

" *Okay!* " Tommy chirps, turning around.

Techno's ears twitch around, the only sound the crackling of netherrack fires. His bow then appears in his hand and in a flash he aims and shoots. The sound of a Ghast dying bursts in

the distance.

" *Holy— that was so cool!*" Tommy says, grinning toothily.

Techno nods awkwardly at the compliment before turning to Lethi. " *While I'm not as nearsighted as most piglins, my vision's still pretty bad compared to a human's. So I adapted. I go by hearin' more than sight for shootin'.* "

" *I'd never thought of doing it that way,* " Lethi muses, appreciatively nodding at his fellow warrior.

" *Wait, Techno, does that mean you actually need glasses?* " Tommy asks.

Techno sighs again. " *Yes. I should wear glasses. I don't like to.* "

Tommy laughs, bright. "You just don't want to look like a neeeeeeeerd!"

"Who out the two of us was ramblin' about the technical side of blacksmithin'?" Techno shoots back.

"Hey!" Tommy exclaims with his usual bluster.

Lethi laughs as Tommy goes into a curse-filled rant about how Techno's the bigger nerd, and not even Techno can hold a small smile from peeking out.

A small beep distracts Techno from the gremlin child, and he looks down at the communicator strapped to his wrist. It's a message from Phil, asking how they are and telling a little bit about how things are going on their end. Apparently, Tubbo and Fundy managed to cobble together two comms so he could give them to Tommy and Wraith. Huh. Neat.

Techno looks up to see that Tommy has run ahead towards the Bastion, now that the entrance is in view, leaving him alone with Lethi.

Normally Techno doesn't have a problem with silence, but it is in moments like this where he's painfully reminded of his own awkwardness. His first thought is to say 'So, nice weather we're having,' but there's no weather, they're in the Nether, so what the hell should he say?

" *I've never seen Tommy so carefree,* " says Lethi, looking at the disappearing form of the gremlin child.

" *Really?* " Techno asks, frowning. " *He's always been this way.* "

Lethi shakes their head. " *The first few days he was with us he was so painfully skittish. Still so loud and a spitfire, but the same way a cornered Hoglin is.* "

His fellow warrior smiles, turning to look at Techno. " *He's only so bright around you. He admires you.* "

Techno scoffs, which draws a confused glance from Lethi.

“ *He admires my skills, he doesn't admire me ,* ” Techno explains gruffly, Tommy's voice grandly proclaiming that they have ‘the Blade’ on their side echoing through his head.

Lethi looks back at him with a baffled expression on their face. “ *Did you know that the thing he talked most about you were not your skills but your stories?* ”

Techno doesn't answer, too busy being shocked. “ *Really?* ”

“ *Really,* ” Lethi says, white eyes revealing nothing but honesty under Techno's scrutiny. “ *I am his battle mentor, and yet when he spoke of you no matter how much it hurt him to do so, he spoke of the places you visited, the myths you are so fond of, the brief time both of you shared together.* ”

Sensing Techno's disbelief, Lethi adds. “ *Of course he mentioned your fighting prowess, but it was an afterthought, or to clarify why he fought the way he did.* ”

Lethi pauses, seemingly considering something, before they make up their mind and says: “ *I would need all of my fingers and toes and then more, to count the times he couldn't help but call you his brother.* ”

There is silence between the both of them, only broken by the sounds of their footsteps. No words are spoken between them as they re-enter the Bastion. Techno only thinks. And thinks. And thinks some more, caught by the uncomfortable realization that he might have misunderstood Tommy in a fundamental way.

“TECHNOOOOOO, WRAITH IS DONE WITH THE POTIONS, WE CAN GO TO THE OVERWORLD!” screams Tommy from beside the aforementioned person.

“I'll be there in a moment,” answers Techno in a much more reasonable volume.

“ *I'll drop this off at the glassmaker,* ” says Lethi motioning with their head to his bucketful of soul sand. “ *But before that, a simple warning.* ”

Lethi's face changes from the laid-back fighting teacher to the stern, merciless Warrior of the Crimson Tribe. “ *If you hurt Wraith or Tommy in any way, I will make sure that you wish you would have been executed.* ”

Techno becomes uncomfortably aware of the brand of Order magic on his wrist, placed there by the Elder, ensuring that no matter what he tries, he'll always come back to the Tribe to finish his punishment.

“ *I wish you safe travels,* ” they then say, smiling like nothing happened, turns around and walks away.

Techno buffers for a second.

“Heh?!?”

The trip back to Techno's cottage is nerve wracking with how *normal* it is.

Tommy spends the entire time on high alert, Prime's magic close to the surface and crackling like thunder under his skin.

Nothing happens. They surface from the portal and into the snowy tundra without a hitch, not a word shared between the three of them, far too busy with keeping vigilant.

And then the cottage comes into view. Tommy could scream for joy but he doesn't. He doesn't wanna jinx them.

It's only until after Phil has opened the door and ushered them inside that Tommy screams "finally!"

Phil snickers good-naturedly and tries to ruffle Tommy's hair like he did when he was younger. Tommy's taking none of that and ducks under his outstretched hand, running deeper into the cottage until he crashes into Tubbo and Ranboo.

"Hi boss man!" Tubbo says turning the flailing mess of limbs into a hug that Tommy gratefully buries himself into.

"Welcome back Tommy," Ranboo says, the tall fucker hugging both of them.

"You two have no fucking idea what shit went down over there," Tommy says. "Techno almost died!"

"What?!?" Ranboo says, pulling back from the hug so he can look at Tommy's face.

"C'mon, Wraith and Techno will tell everybody what happened," he explains, grabbing both of them by the wrists and tugging towards the living room. "Move it you—"

"Hi Tommy," says Dream, stepping into their path, a smile evident in his voice. "How was your trip?"

Tommy freezes, the grip on his friend's wrists tightening. His wings spread out and puff up minutely, instinctively trying to shield Ranboo and Tubbo.

"What's with the hostilities?" Dream says, sounding genuinely confused, but Tommy has heard that tone before, in casually cruel remarks and honest-sounding questions of 'why would anybody want you around?'

"Dream, quit talkin' and come to the livin' room," comes Techno's gruff voice, peeking out from the end of the corridor.

"Sure," Dream says, turning around to leave.

Techno catches Tommy's gaze, minutely nodding. That alone tells Tommy that Techno's interruption was planned, a deliberate play to keep Dream away from him.

Tommy nods back, mouthing thank you.

"Why are your hands shaking?" asks Tubbo.

Tommy lets go of their hands as if they burned, cradling them to his chest. His first instinct is to yell at them, but he stops himself. “Later. I’ll tell you later.”

With that he walks silently towards the living room, both of his friends following. They are the last to arrive.

“So uh,” Techno starts, glancing at Wraith to see if they want to tell the story, but they don’t do anything else aside from raising a single eyebrow. “I mighta forgot a tiny detail before agreein’ to go to the Bastion.”

And he tells that he didn’t think the Crimson Tribe would be at the Bastion, and he kind of forgot that he was the Warrior of the Tribe when he left it. Which ended up amounting into a Trial.

Phil looks torn between laughing at Techno’s misfortune and asking if he’s okay. Dream has no issue choosing to laugh at Techno, wheezing like a tea-kettle.

There’s no mention of Dream and what he did involved in the Trial. Tommy asked Techno not to tell, and he’s relieved that he’s keeping his promise.

“We’ve brought a few translated books,” Wraith says, when Techno’s done with telling about the trial in a deceptively casual way. “Mostly the ones that have to do with what we’re going to face.”

And then it is their turn to tell the information gathered. Nobody’s laughing at the end.

“Let me get this straight, we’re facing a *demigod*, and to cure Purpled we’re going to have to *burn him alive with soulfire?!?*” asks Fundy, ears folded tight against his head.

“Yes,” Wraith answers, completely missing the fact it was a rhetorical question. “Purpled is still in the basement, is he not?”

“Yeah,” Phil grimaces. “So how’re we going to do this?”

“Wraith will brew some sleep potions and throw it at the kid to knock ‘im out and force him to set a spawn in a bed here,” says Techno, clearly having been giving it thought. “We’ll build a tiny obsidian cube outside, shove him inside and then we light the soul sand.”

“Making those potions will take me less than a few seconds,” says Wraith. “They’re just a combination of weakness and slowness, and I already have those.”

“So we only need the obsidian cube,” says Foolish, grimacing a little. “I can build that real fast.”

“I’ll help with that,” says Puffy.

“I can help with that too,” says Tommy, thinking of the opportunity of practicing his powers.

“I think you kids should be the ones waiting at Purpled’s bed to welcome him after the respawn,” says Puffy, and Tommy knows that’s just her way of keeping them as far away

from the carnage that's going to be the burning.

He's kind of okay with that. He's got enough trauma to last him a lifetime and then some.

"Uh, where do I go?" Fundy asks, a little confused.

"I already said?" Puffy answers.

Fundy tilts his head remarkably like a puppy, before it clicks. "I'm not a kid!"

"Coulda fooled me," says Tommy, sparking off a few giggles.

"Yeah! Come with us, Fundy!" Tubbo says with a mischievous grin. "Aren't you like, five? That's a kid's age!"

"I'm *not a kid!*" Fundy says as both Tommy and Tubbo begin tugging him towards the basement. "I don't age like a human and you know that!"

"Don't fight it, buddy," Ranboo says with a long-suffering tone but a little smile peeking from his lips. "You can't escape."

"Noooooo," Fundy screeches, the laughs from the people still in the living room growing fainter. Still, he resigns himself to his fate and they go down the stairs to the basement.

"Alright, I'm going to need two of you to open the doors, and the other two as standby in case Purpled tries to fight," says Wraith, mixing the two potions without looking or spilling a single drop.

"I call dibs on fighting!" Tommy screeches at the same time Ranboo says "I'll get the door."

Fundy and Tubbo look at each other.

"Rock paper scissors?" proposes Fundy.

"Sure!" Tubbo answers, getting his hands into position.

"Rock paper scissors shoot!" They both say.

"I won!" Fundy says, tail wagging happily, before his expression goes bewildered. "Wait, the winner gets what?"

Tubbo snickers. "I'll get the door."

The five of them get into position, Wraith with a potion in each hand.

"Count of three," they say. "One, two, three!"

Tubbo and Ranboo wrench the doors open, and Purpled jumps out of it, immediately stumbling.

He's wrapped in chains, hands bound behind his back, but his legs are free and he sure as hell tries to use them.

Tommy hits the back of Purpled's knee with the blunt end of his spear, making him buckle and fall mid-kick, only for the sleeping potion to hit him in the face point-blank.

"THE BLOODVINES WILL FIND YOU," Purpled screams, letting the red blooms inside his mouth be seen, trying to heave himself off the floor. "THEY WILL FIND YOU AND AVENGE— avenge."

He stumbles in his attempt to stand upright, sinking to his knees, his bloodshot eyes blinking tiredly. "Avenge... me...."

He collapses on the floor, completely out.

"We forgot to bring a bed," Ranboo informs sheepishly.

Both Fundy and Tubbo facepalm, Wraith sighing in disappointment.

"That's alright," Tommy says, cracking his knuckles. His hands start glowing in a golden hue, fingers drawing the pattern of creation.

A bed shimmers into existence in the center of the room, the golden glow dissipating.

"That should do it!" he says, looking proudly at what he summoned. Creating objects out of nothing, check! He'll tell Foolish about his progress later.

"Tommy *what the fuck was that*," hisses Fundy.

Tommy turns, looking at his three open-mouthed friends. "Did what?"

"You poofed a bed into existence?!?" Fundy insists.

"What are you talking about, big man?" Tommy says, mouth running a mile a minute. "That bed was there this whole time. Yeah, nothing poofed out of anything—"

"Stop trying to gaslight us! First the wings, and the scars and the golden fucking eyes, and now this?!?" says Tubbo, fists clenched, but his eyes are worried. "Tommy, what's going on? What happened to you?"

Tommy opens his mouth, then closes it with a click.

He really, *really* doesn't want to tell them what happened. He'd rather tell some stupid joke and pretend things haven't changed. But they all look worried and he knows that they won't stop worrying unless he tells and—

"Tommy, *breathe*," Wraith says, gently laying a hand on his shoulder.

He does, pulling big breaths into his lungs, shoving back the panic with a mental stick.

“ *Should I tell them?* ” he asks, stepping into a hug.

“ *Those are two questions disguised as one. The first is ‘do I have to tell them?’ and the answer is no. You have the right to tell as little or as much as you want,* ” Wraith says, rubbing comforting circles into his back. “*The other question is ‘can I tell them?’ and I haven’t known them very long, so I can’t say if we can trust them or not.* ”

Tommy mulls the question over, peeking over Wraith’s shoulder to look at the three of them.

He knows immediately that he trusts Ranboo. He was the only person to consistently visit in exile, leaving letters behind when he couldn’t, even when Dream started intercepting them.

He trusts Fundy. He’s his nephew for Prime’s sake. He made a promise to himself that he would protect him ever since he held the tiny, fluffy bundle that used to be baby Fundy.

Tubbo... Tommy knows he should be angry that he was exiled, but it just isn’t there. It had taken time, but in the end he realized that Tubbo was being manipulated, just as he had been.

He trusts them. Tommy takes a deep breath. “ *Go bring Purpled to the obsidian cube thingy. I’ll be alright.* ”

“*I’m proud of you, Tommy,* ” Wraith says, and Tommy would be lying if he said his eyes were dry at that moment.

Tommy steps back from the hug and turns towards his nephew and his two best friends. “You should sit down. This is a long story.”

The three of them look at each other and sit down. Ranboo even pulls out his memory book, and Tommy smiles at the action, settling himself on the stone floor too.

He’s reminded a little of his hearing at the Bastion, but he shakes the comparison. He has a choice here, and this time he *chooses* to be truthful. So he opens his mouth and talks.

He starts with exile, and with every word out of his mouth Tubbo looks more and more horrified. He has to look away, because he can’t bear the guilt festering in his best friend’s eyes.

And then Purpled starts screaming again, audible even through the layers of stone and ground separating them from the outside. Tommy talks louder to cover the sounds up, but he doesn’t think it helps. They still have that look of pity– it’s not pity shut up brain , concern and dread in their eyes.

He recognizes he’s stalling a little. He doesn’t want to tell them about jumping into the lava. So he asks for a little pause, just until Wraith is back.

The screams cut off, Purpled’s body starting to weave himself together on the bed, muscles growing over bone like Lichtenberg figures. Tommy takes a second to tap into his divine magic, scanning the respawning boy. He’s free of bloodvines. That fact is a relief.

Wraith glides down into the basement, and Tommy leans into them, psyching himself up.

He tells when Dream found his small stash under Logstedshire and blew everything up. How he watched his last shreds of hope turn to ash and decided he'll go out on his own terms.

Fundy's crying now, eyes glassy and far away. Tommy realizes he almost forced Fundy into losing a father and uncle to suicide.

He's felt embarrassed of his failed attempt before. He hasn't felt guilty though, and the new emotion sits uncomfortably in his chest.

Wraith gently squeezes his hand, silently asking if he'd like for them to tell the rest of the story. Tommy shakes his head. He's stronger than this.

So he keeps going. He talks about the first few awkward days in Wraith's care. Smiles as he tells stories of the Crimson Tribe and bitches about having to learn Piglish. He can't help describing Netheel and the mischief they got up to, or Lethi and his steady voice as he demonstrated how to use a spear.

And Dream ruins fucking *everything* by dumping an entire lava lake on the Tribe.

"What a bitch," Tubbo says, lightening the mood and sparking a few giggles.

"I know, right?" Fundy says, grinning. "I can't believe I wanted to marry the guy."

"Terrible taste in men," Ranboo says sagely.

Tommy smiles a little. He loathes to break the fun atmosphere, but he still has to tell them of the dozens of piglins dead and the solemn march towards the lava sea for the funerals.

"Oh," says Tubbo, voice small.

"Yeah," says Tommy. "Piglins don't have three lives, so the village getting burnt was pretty deadly."

There's a bit of a tense silence.

"The Bastion was cool though!" Tommy blurts out, breaking the tension.

He starts rambling about the gold-inlaid walls and the hoglin stables and the forge and how cool Anala is and the pog weapons he's forged.

"That sounds cool, d'you think they'd let us visit?" asks Ranboo, pausing in his frantic scribbling.

"They don't let anyone not of the Tribe visit," says Tommy sheepishly.

"Do you think they'd let me join?" asks Tubbo.

"What?!?" Tommy says. "But what about L'Manburg?"

“I did a shit job as President,” Tubbo laughs self-deprecatingly. “I don’t care if L’Manburg survives this, I’m not going back. I’m going where you go.”

“You know, living in a place where rain is not a thing? Sign me up!” jokes Ranboo, but his tone is earnest.

“I don’t think I’d be able to live in the Nether cuz I’m a little too, uh, *furry* to stand the heat,” says Fundy, vaguely gesturing to the fine layer of white-streaked, bright orange layer of fur on his skin. “But I dig the idea of building a house on the Overworld, with a Nether portal that connects close to the Bastion.”

“Guys,” says Tommy, touched, a wobbly smile on his face. Also, there are too many feelings in his chest. He doesn’t want to start crying so he just speaks through the knot in his throat and says “Fundy, did you just admit you’re a *furry*?”

“ *What*. No!” He says, his fur poofing out in outrage. “Just because I have fur doesn’t mean I’m a furry! That’s not what that means!”

“What’s a furry?” asks Wraith.

“You *don’t* want to know,” says Fundy. “But, uh, speaking of hybrids. Since when are you a hybrid, Tommy?”

“I was getting to that,” he says. “I gotta tell you about Prime first though.”

Tommy launches into the story of who Champions are and what they do, and he explains that he’s now the Champion of Prime (hence the golden eyes), and that she gave him the mission to search for her old Champion, Foolish.

He quickly mentions his magic training (and does the magic-sparkler-fingers trick because he wants to brag a little) before he mentions that Foolish noticed a magic seal on his back.

So he quickly explains that Dream’s ‘no flying’ rule he made everybody swear by when they entered the server? Yeah, that was a magically-binding promise that literally forced Tommy’s wings to stay inside his body.

And overdue wings sprouting from your back? That fucking *sucks*. But Foolish and Puffy were nice and helped him through it, and Philza’s instincts probably pushed him into helping Tommy.

“And that’s when you got arrested and we came here,” Tommy says, awkwardly scratching his head. “So, yeah.”

“Tommy, I’m so sorry I exiled you. I—“ Tubbo says, goat ears folded close to his head.

“I forgive you, Tubso,” Tommy says, smiling.

“You shouldn’t!” Tubbo says, sounding close to tears.

“Too bad, I already did,” Tommy says, smiling mischievously. “Deal with it.”

Tubbo snuffles, and then engulfs Tommy in a hug, shoulders shaking. Ranboo is not far behind, warbling an enderman sound as he curls his long limbs around both.

“...Fuck it,” Fundy says, and then burrows his way into the hug.

Wraith simply puts their hand on Tommy’s shoulder, a little awkward about hugging people they don’t truly know.

Tommy feels warm in a way he hasn’t felt in months, surrounded by his favorite people. If he cries a little, it’s nobody’s business but his own.

A beep comes from Wraith’s brand-new communicator, and they fumble with the keys for a moment. “Dinner is ready, we should go and pick it up.”

“I’ll stay here and watch over Purpled,” Tommy says, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand.

“I’ll get you a plate,” Wraith says, smiling as they float upright. His friends follow, leaving him leaning against the bed.

He glances around the room, making sure he’s alone.

“... Purpled, I know you’re listening,” Tommy says, turning to look towards the bed.

Purpled’s eye opens, the other one still in progress. Half his face doesn’t have skin yet. “How did you know,” Purpled says, though his voice sounds weird, considering part of his throat is not there.

“I’ve respawned twice, I know how this works,” Tommy says, smiling sardonically. “How much did you hear?”

“From where you started living with Wraith, but I can guess what happened before that,” he answers, closing his eye again.

“I didn’t let you hear ‘cuz I wanted you to pity me,” Tommy states, looking away towards the door. “It was a warning to stay the fuck away from Dream.”

“A fucking hell of a warning.” Purpled says tiredly.

There’s an awkward silence between the two.

“Any tips for respawning?” Purpled says, voice strained.

“Focus on the parts of your body that are done growing back and don’t move,” says Tommy. “Also distractions. Lots and lots of distractions. Want me to distract you?”

“Sure,” he grits out.

Tommy launches into recounting his How to Sex book series. He’s still going by the time his friends come back with food. Their weirded-out faces are *priceless*.

Tubbo can't sleep.

After the mess with getting Purpled back, everybody silently decided to turn in for the night. The minors plus Wraith and Fundy decided to have a slumber party in the basement, beds haphazardly placed on the stone floor.

And now, surrounded by his favorite people in the world, Tubbo still *can't fucking sleep*.

His mind is still going in circles, around and around, guilt chasing anger again and again.

With a frustrated huff, Tubbo kicks his sheets off and heads to the kitchen, careful not to wake anyone. He sits on the kitchen table and puts his head in his hands.

Okay. He's just stuck in a spiral, he knows how to fix this First: break down the facts.

Dream is a bitch and he wants him nowhere near Tommy. The gods seem to think they'll need all four Champions to beat the Egg. They can't afford to run him off because he's a really good warrior *and* Exdeh's Champion.

Right. He can't change Dream's bitchiness, but he *can* try to force Dream away from Tommy. Not enough to run him off, since they still need him. It sucks that he can't do more, Dream's still way too powerful and—

Wait. Tubbo's eyes widen as a wild idea pops into his head.

Dream as a Champion and fighter is too powerful. But what if he could make Dream stop being a Champion?

Tubbo dashes off the table and up the stairs, practically skidding to a stop in front of Puffy's and Foolish's room. He knocks softly but insistently.

"Whos'it?" calls Foolish, clearly still half-asleep.

Tubbo doesn't even wait for an answer and bursts into the room.

"Tubbo, it's three in the morning," says Puffy, rubbing her eyes. "Are you okay?"

"I need your help," Tubbo says, head held high and eyes full of determination.

Puffy and Foolish look at each other. "What do you need?" Puffy asks, already sitting up in her bed.

"Help me piss off a god," Tubbo answers.

Fun worldbuilding fact: a "furry" in this world is a human who has a fetish for hybrids, and the word itself is a holdover from a time (like, 100+ years ago) where humans were much more numerous than hybrids and also racist towards them.

The kids know about this word because Wilbur used to get teased with it, since he was one of the few pure humans left and he fell in love with Sally. However, the kids have no idea what it actually means and keep using it wrong XD

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The day dawned in muffled excitement. Foolish, Puffy and Tubbo all tried their best to tell everyone else the plan without Dream noticing. Tubbo's pretty sure Dream still noticed that *something* was up, but couldn't tell what. That was good. Now they could move to step one.

Step one of Tubbo's plan involved a lot of spamming. Just so much spamming. Books worth of spamming.

Tubbo: DRISTA

DEISTA I NEED TO SPWAK WITH UOY

DEIYSTAAAAAAAAAAAA

WHERE AUURE YOU

ANDWER MEEE

"Any luck?" he says, looking to see Tommy and Ranboo doing the same thing.

"Nope," Ranboo answers, his claws clacking on the screen.

Tommy's suspiciously piglin grunt of frustration is also answer enough.

"If she doesn't answer we can give her contact to everyone else and get them to spam her too," Tubbo says, mostly talking to himself.

"Don't fucking do that."

All three of them jump, Ranboo going as far to jump a few feet away out of sheer shock.

Snickering at them, holding a still-buzzing communicator in her hand, is Drista.

"You've been messaging me for an *hour*," she says, her golden hair drifting around her head as if underwater, contrasting with the utterly mundane bright green hoodie and white shorts she's wearing. "An *hour* !"

"Yeah, yeah, listen," Tubbo says, grinning. "Oh great demigoddess Drista, patron of all mischief, do you want to help us play a prank on your brother?"

"I'm listening," she says, sitting criss-cross in midair, hands stapled together like a cartoon villain.

"Tell us where the End portal is," says Tubbo.

The painted smile on Drista's mask changes into an exclamation mark.

"He'll get so mad if you open it, he'll probably kill you," she says, concerned, the exclamation mark shifting into a painted frown.

"Don't worry, I got a plan," he says, grinning.

"Well, I hope you know what you're doing!" she says, and Tubbo's communicator buzzes, a series of coordinates popping into the screen.

"We'll hang out later," Drista says, her mask now in a happy face. "But if I interfere any more with this, Exdeh will be mad at me and not in a funny way. So bye!"

She then pops out of existence, as if she was never there in the first place.

"Alright, step two is a go," Tubbo says.

Tommy and Tubbo run to the basement, quickly filling their inventory with food, ender pearls and potions, while Ranboo goes to tell Techno and Foolish it's showtime.

With their inventories ready, both try very hard to look casual as they go upstairs to the living room.

"We're runnin' out of firewood," says Techno, slamming the door of the wood cabinet closed. "Unless you all want food that tastes like Netherrack, I'll need some people to get it."

"We'll go!" chirps Tubbo.

"Not alone," contradicts Wraith. "Not with the infected running around."

"How about the four of us?" says Foolish enthusiastically. "We should be okay!"

"Yeah, four's good," gruffly says Techno. "We're gonna go a few ways away. I'm not lowerin' my property value by fellin' the trees near my house."

The whole interaction was scripted. Tubbo thought about it long and hard about what to use as an excuse while they disappear to the Stronghold for a while.

"I can go with you?" Dream says from behind Tubbo.

Tubbo jumps, whipping around to stare at the porcelain mask, his heart beating loudly. Tommy squawks his wings flaring out wildly.

"Careful," Dream says, and Tommy stiffens. "If you're all so worried about getting attacked, I could go."

Tubbo can practically feel the smugness radiating from the masked bastard. He's probably looking forward to subtly tormenting Tommy the entire trip. Asshole.

“Nah,” says Techno, flicking an ear dismissively. “We’re goin’ to need you here in case the infected attack, and we can’t leave the house alone without its two best fighters.”

“Did— did you just compliment me?” Dream says, grinning wildly under his mask.

“I need to get you to stay around,” Techno says, walking towards the door. “For the clout, of course.”

Dream laughs. “Good luck outside, then!”

Tommy and Tubbo take that as their cue to scurry outside, and behind them steps out Foolish, who closes the door.

“Okay, step three,” says Tubbo, looking at the coordinates and pulling a stack of ender pearls from his inventory. “It’s in that direction, let’s go.”

The journey passes both too fast and too slow, taking damage from the multiple pearl throws, sinking into snow, and checking the course. Everybody’s too keyed up to talk; they’re on a time limit.

They don’t even talk when they arrive at the coordinates, just silently letting Foolish carve a staircase down.

Foolish almost falls directly into the portal. It’s only Techno’s fast reflexes that save him from taking a dip in the lava under the portal frame.

“Thanks!” Foolish says, smiling gratefully, before snaps with glowing fingers and magics the rest of the staircase into existence.

They spill into the room.

Tubbo looks around, the crumbling stone walls lined with moss, the strange, horizontal portal, the glowing of the lava underneath. Techno hurries to destroy the silverfish spawner while Foolish blocks the exit of the chamber, the one that isn’t their staircase. Just in case.

“Now what?” says Tommy.

“We open it,” answers Tubbo.

“How do we do that?” he questions, sticking his head under the portal curiously.

“I don’t know,” Tubbo responds, looking at the portal frame with a frown.

“Maybe we need to light it?” Tommy says, taking a flint and steel from his inventory and striking it against the stone.

Nothing happens.

“Aren’t those eyes of ender?” Foolish asks, pointing at the two softly glowing orbs embedded on opposite sides of the portal.

“That’s it!” Tubbo says, pulling out his ender pearls. “Does anybody have blaze powder?”

“No, but I can make some,” Tommy says, putting his hands together, the tips of his fingers shining, and separating them to create a blaze rod.

“Wait, everyone stay silent,” Techno says, his ears swiveling around.

There is a moment where the only sound Tubbo can hear is the crackling of lava.

“There’s someone coming from above,” he says, drawing his sword.

Tommy curses loudly as armor manifests from their inventories. He draws his spear, while Tubbo grips his axe. Foolish quickly blocks the staircase he made before grabbing his bow.

There is a tense silence. Then *hisss* .

“TNT!” screams Tommy, as three of them scramble backwards.

Foolish doesn’t move. Instead he creates layer after layer of stone between them and the explosives in a matter of seconds, Prime’s power at his fingertips.

The blast smacks Tubbo against the stone wall of the chamber, dust and debris raining down on them and forcing him to cough. His ears ring and he’s sure his side is bruised, but he still whirls around, axe ready.

Dream drops down from the hole in the ceiling, landing on the portal frame with all the grace of a panther, casually kicking Foolish’s unconscious body into the lava.

“Well, color me surprised,” he says, his axe held casually at his side, the smell of burnt gold on Foolish’s skin flooding the chamber as it protects him from being burnt alive. “I didn’t expect all of you to find this place.”

“You followed us, you prick!” Tommy spits, wings held at the ready.

“I did. Did you really think I was that stupid?” Dream says. “All of you were acting strange and you didn’t even protest at having to go chop wood? C’mon, I know you better than that, Tommy.”

“You don’t know me at all!” Tommy screams, feathers ruffling.

“Oh I do,” Dream grins, his mask cracking in an X shape, green light spilling from the breaks. “And I should teach all of you a lesson.”

Dream jumps into action, slamming his axe into Techno’s shield, both getting stuck in a standstill. The cracks in his mask shine brighter, and suddenly he’s able to push Techno back.

Tommy lunges for Foolish, pulling him out of the lava.

“GET THE PORTAL!” Tubbo screams, turning the blaze rod into powder and slamming the two together to make ender eyes.

Tubbo leaps for the portal, shoving an eye into the frame before a crossbow bolt shoves itself into his shoulder. He screams, ducking for cover, instinctively putting pressure on his bleeding wound.

“Shit, Tubbo!” Tommy says, running at him full-speed and barely dodging another bolt before he skids to a stop before Tubbo, healing potion already in hand.

The maneuver is one Tubbo knows, tried and true since the independence war days. Tubbo pulls the arrow from his shoulder and Tommy spills the potion in the wound.

Tubbo doesn’t bother to muffle his shriek of pain, instead taking a deep breath and peeking through the gap between the portal and the stone floor.

Dream is overpowering Techno, wildly changing between being stronger or faster than his opponent every time his mask flares with green light.

He’s realizing he might have miscalculated a little. How did it now occur to him that they had no idea what Exdeh’s power is?

Techno huffs, taking a hit from the blunt end of Dream’s axe before lashing out with his own.

“What’s wrong, Blood Champion?” Dream cackles, and Tubbo hasn’t heard Dream sound this deranged in his *life*. Fuck, he needs to hurry. “Why aren’t you using your blessings?”

The mask shines again and his weapon blurs, digging into Techno’s hip with a wet *schlick!*

“Don’t tell me it’s because you’re worried you’ll hurt them!” Dream laughs as he parries Techno’s swing with one hand. “The Champion of Chaos, scared of losing control of his power!”

Tubbo looks up just in time to see Dream’s off-hand shine toxic green, fingers elongating into claws. Fast as a viper, the neon claws curl around Techno’s neck.

“You’ve grown *weak*, Technoblade,” Dream says, conspiratorially, as if this was a secret only for greatest rival to know. “You’ve gotten attached! Phil, I could have excused, he can take care of himself, but you’ve grown to care for these *brats*— “

Dream gets cut off by Techno’s knee slamming into his stomach, forcing him a few steps back.

“I have— never pretended to be unattached,” Techno says calmly, even as he struggles for air.

“Then die for them,” answers Dream, foregoing his axe to make both his hands into wicked claws.

Techno grimaces, but raises his axe.

“Fuck off you prick!” Tommy screams, throwing his spear at Dream.

Dream simply dodges the throw, but the split second is enough of an opening for Techno to swing his axe and score a deep gash on Dream’s side.

“YOU’LL PAY FOR THAT!” Dream screams, truly enraged for the first time, glowing runes wrapping around his arms. “I’LL MAKE YOU REGRET EVEN TRYING TO GO AGAINST ME!”

Tubbo won’t give him the chance.

He slams the second-to-last eye into the portal, other one held at the ready when—

Green lightning crackles in the center of the room, solidifying into a human-like figure, three pairs of doll-like hands extending from under a cloak of green that, when Tubbo looks closer, is not a cloak but hundreds of thousands of iridescent bug wings layered on top of each other. It doesn’t have legs, instead pure darkness flowing from under them. Two rings spin around its mannequin-like face, forming an X over a grinning mouth as dark as the void.

“FINALLY!” Dream says, grinning like a maniac under his mask. “These idiots were trying to open the portal, and I was trying to stop them.”

“Is that true?” says Exdeh, voice tinged with static and resonating through Tubbo’s body in a way that makes him want to turn around and *run* .

But he doesn’t. Instead he squares his shoulders and pulls from his years of living under Schlatt, fear hidden under a stern facade.

“No. I was attempting to get your attention,” Tubbo says, throwing the last ender eye into the lava. “I’m here to ask something of you.”

“And what would that be?” Exdeh says, turning to face Tubbo fully. It towers over him, Tubbo barely reaching where it’s hip should be, were it human. But there is interest in his tone that Tubbo desperately hopes he isn’t imagining.

“Make me your Champion,” Tubbo says.

There is a second of silence, before it is broken by Dream’s tea kettle laugh as he doubles over.

Tubbo swallows his nerves. This is the riskiest part of the plan, and it was not supposed to go like this. They were supposed to arrive at the Stronghold unnoticed and get Exdeh’s attention, so Tubbo could ask. If Exdeh said no, it would end there, and Dream would have been none the wiser.

But now he’s gambling their ability to survive this on the whims of a god. They *need* four Champions, and Tubbo doesn’t think Dream will agree to fight with them after this.

“I already have a Champion,” the god says, gazing at Tubbo who is desperately trying to hide his crestfallen expression. **“But…”**

Dream's laughter cuts off abruptly.

"How many centuries have passed since I chose Dream?" Exdeh muses, casually, one of his hands resting pensively on its chin. **"Mortals change, don't they?"**

Tommy and Tubbo exchange looks, and there is hope in their eyes.

"A test, yes," Exdeh declares, his void-mouth quirking up into a bigger grin. **"A test to determine which one of you is worthy of being my Champion."**

"I accept," says Tubbo, trying to project confidence he doesn't have.

Dream hesitates, and Tubbo is sure he's frowning behind his mask. If Dream realizes that if he says no to the test he could just keep being a Champion, they are done for. But Tubbo is more observant than people give him credit for.

"I'm confident I can win this," Tubbo says to Exdeh, without looking at Dream.

"Then I accept too," Dream says.

Hook, line and sinker, with Dream's competitiveness as the bait.

"Very well, let's begin!" Exdeh says, the rings around his head flying off, expanding midair and moving towards both of them. The rings end up hovering around them, as if each of them is Saturn.

"What—"

Tubbo gasps awake.

The first thing he sees is a starless sky, a void of black. He's laying on black and white tiles, the cold slipping into his bones.

He sits up. He can see marble arches in the distance, the white and black tile stretching as far as his eyes can see.

He stands, suddenly realizing he's wearing a white suit embroidered with light grey details. It's so unbelievably intricate that Tubbo's sure that it could have cost just as much as Foolish's entire summer home.

"Tubbo! Finally!" says Wilbur.

Tubbo freezes. He hasn't heard Wilbur's voice in so long he'd forgotten what it sounded like.

Wilbur's wearing another suit just as intricate as Tubbo's, but the shoulders flare to make them look a little rectangular. There's a tiny crown on his head, slightly tilting to one side. "We can't start the game without you!"

“The game?” Tubbo asks. Suddenly he realizes there are multiple people nearing where he is, all wearing white suits.

“Big man!” shouts Tommy, splitting off from the approaching group and sprinting towards them. He holds a spear that its tip reminds Tubbo of a bishop chess piece.

That sparks something in Tubbo’s brain. The tiles under his feet look like a chessboard. He glances at the approaching group, and sees Niki wielding a similar spear. Fundy’s and Foolish’s helmets have tufts of bright white hair that looks like a horse’s mane. Techno and Puffy wear crowns that look like the very tops of castle towers. Drista is there, wearing a full suit with a flowing skirt, open in the front, and crown resting on her head. Behind her walk seven more people, all wearing the exact same suit

He’s— Tubbo’s supposed to play chess against Dream, with the pieces being his friends. And, he realizes with a sinking feeling, Tubbo himself is a pawn and the player.

“Alright, everybody get into position!” shouts Wilbur, moving to take the spot of the king, Drista hovering beside him in the square belonging to the queen.

“C’mon, man!” says Quackity, slinging an arm around Tubbo’s shoulders. “Let’s go! Us pawns gotta look out for each other.”

“Right,” Tubbo says, walking forward so he’s the pawn right in front of Wilbur.

He looks at the horizon, and finds Dream’s pieces on the other side. Dream himself is wearing the crown and the suit with a flowing skirt of a queen, George standing beside him with the tiny crown and elaborate suit of a king.

White moves first, Tubbo remembers. But in this game, what does it mean to move—?

Tubbo gasps as electricity goes down his spine, mind reeling as he gains a sixth sense. He knows exactly where Tommy is by the loud and scattered quality of his thoughts without turning around. He can tell that Niki’s calm by her flowing train of thought, that Quackity is more nervous than he appears, his thoughts flicking around like lightning.

He can’t exactly tell *what* they’re thinking, but he does know *how* they’re thinking it, whether it’s hurriedly or calmly or logically or—

He gets a second rush of power, this time guided by an instinct that he was sure he didn’t have. Reaching out with his sudden new sense, he focuses on Fundy, one of his knights, and tells him to vault over Hannah, the white pawn.

He can perceive as the idea nestles in Fundy’s brain, seamlessly incorporating into his thoughts and turning from just an idea to an action.

Tubbo also realizes everything is in slow motion. Or more likely, he’s thinking so fast everything *feels* as if it’s in slow motion.

‘So this is how this game is played,’ Tubbo thinks, feeling like he’s standing in the eye of a hurricane as all pieces on the board start moving simultaneously. ‘All pieces make their own

decisions, but the players, with Exdeh's power, can give commands to one piece each time.'

As the black pieces begin advancing as well, they enter the range of his new mind-sense, each person lighting up in his mind. He can see the entire board without his eyes.

Tubbo steps forward. The battle begins.

He's painfully aware of how much slower the pawns move compared to the blazingly fast bishops or rooks. Puffy speeds past him, drawing a massive club and clearly aiming for Schlatt, a black knight.

As Tubbo steps into the path of Sam, a black pawn, he focuses on Puffy's mind and shoves into her awareness that if she went for Schlatt, she'd be in Punz's range.

She veers from her course, instead hitting Vikkstar with a heavy swing, making him crumple to the ground, taking one of Dream's pawns off the board.

Purpled is in a good position to deal with Punz instead, and using a pawn to capture a rook would put him in a better position— The command he sends into Purpled's mind doesn't merge into it, instead remaining on the surface like oil on water.

Tubbo is confused for a second, before he realizes: isn't Punz Purpled's brother? He knows, like he instinctively knows everyone's state of mind, that he could force Purpled to attack Punz anyway.

Tubbo doesn't want to. Instead, he orders Purpled to scare Punz off with a swipe of his sword.

Then Tubbo has to throw himself backwards as Phil, a black bishop, swings his spear at his head. He yelps, side-stepping as Sapnap tries to smack him too, wielding the heavy hammer of a rook.

He's forced to order Drista to protect him, hiding behind her axe-swings as both Phil and Sapnap try to get him. Tubbo notices that their eyes are shining bright green, and glances behind them to see Dream's fingers shining with the green runes of Exdeh's power.

Dream has decided to end the game by killing the player.

Tubbo's hands shake.

He uses his power to command Fundy to help Drista and runs as far from those two as he can. He needs to *think*, but he can't help but be hyper aware of the black pieces surrounding him and the fact he's being hunted, he can't—

"Tubbo, are you okay?" says Wilbur, an ornate dagger in his hand.

"DO I LOOK FUCKING OKAY?!?" Tubbo snaps, and almost winces at his own voice but then remembers that this Wilbur isn't real; none of this place is real. So it doesn't matter what he says. "I am a fucking failure of a leader! Everything I've tried to lead has fallen to pieces around me and now I have to fight against *him*? What the hell am I supposed to do?!?"

Tubbo grits his teeth, trying not to cry, staring at the floor. "Why did I ever think my plan was a good idea?"

Wilbur seems to be frozen, unsure of what to do.

"Why the fuck am I talking to you?" Tubbo says.

Tubbo closes his eyes, takes a deep breath. He already made this decision, he can't take it back. He doesn't know if this was a mistake, but he can try his fucking best to make sure it isn't. He owes Tommy that much.

And besides, he wants revenge. Dream has done his best to take everything away from them.

Tubbo opens his eyes. He wants to take *everything* from Dream as well.

Concentrate. Look at the facts.

One: Forcing someone to do something they don't want to do takes a lot of energy.

Two: Dream is gunning for Tubbo.

Three: Tubbo isn't better than Dream at chess.

Four: This isn't chess. Not completely.

A plan forms in Tubbo's mind.

Sound returns like an avalanche, but Tubbo ignores it. Instead, he widens his senses as far as they can go and pulls Wilbur to the back. He calls Techno and Fundy to him, ordering Drista to protect Wilbur instead.

And then Tubbo walks forward to the middle of the board. Immediately, Phil goes back on the offense, but his movements are not as fluid as before; they're hesitant and then aggressive, like someone is shoving him to attack when he's unwilling to hurt his son and grandson. His bright green eyes are a dead giveaway that this is true.

He orders Purpled to get into Punz's way, not to attack, just to block his path. He orders Quackity to do the same, but with Sapnap. Foolish against Eret. Ponk against Sam.

Dream is not the only one that can use people's attachments against them.

He orders Puffy to wait for his signal.

Slowly but surely he keeps advancing, mind whirling, trying to keep his pieces safe.

And then:

"You're not winning this!" screams Dream, manic glee in his voice, as he takes the first steps into the fray.

And immediately cuts Foolish's head clean off his body.

"NO!" Puffy screams, and it takes a desperate push of Tubbo's powers to keep her back.

"Just wait, please," Tubbo says, hoping his words reach her. "I promise we'll avenge him."

She relents, but her anguish is loud in Tubbo's head. He swallows, orders Jack into position.

"Ooooh, Tubo!" Dream says, swinging his queen's axe at Tommy. "Be careful or I'll—"

'He's not the real Tommy,' Tubbo tells himself, walks forward as fast as he can with his pawn-speed, directing Hannah into position.

"Are you trying to get yourself a promotion?" Dream says, laughing, as he swings and cuts Tommy down as if he was a tree. "How cute!"

Dream turns, starting a sprint towards Tubbo himself.

"Check!" Tubbo screams.

Dream skids to a stop, looking wildly towards Goerge. Puffy holds her hammer poised to kill over the black king's head.

Dream hisses curses, directing Punz to protect him.

The masked bastard has finally realized the situation. Because he was so focused on gunning for Tubbo, he forgot the larger game around him. Now, George is surrounded. Tubbo allows himself a second of grinning before he pushes himself to run faster.

"Check!" Tubbo screams again, this time Jack cutting off George's escape route, Fundy in position to kill with his knight's lance.

Dream lets out a scream of frustration, this time speeding towards Fundy, stabbing him through the back.

"Check!"

Jack stands, pawn's sword at George's neck. He's crushed by Punz's hammer.

"Check!"

Puffy is again in range to kill the king, protected by Quackity. Dream bashes the duck's hybrid head in with the butt of his axe. Tubbo orders Puffy to retreat. They've bought enough time and—

"Don't you fucking dare—" snarls Dream. Even with a queen's speed, Dream himself is too far to stop Tubbo's path towards the end of the board.

Ranboo stands in front of Tubbo's path, black bishop spear held at the ready.

Tubbo keeps walking, head held high, as he steps into Ranboo's path.

Ranboo raises his spear, eyes glowing a toxic green. Tubbo closes his eyes.

The killing blow doesn't come.

He opens his eyes again, to see Ranboo gripping his head, the green in his eyes flickering.

Dream himself has his fists curled as they shake, green runes flickering, face turned in Ranboo's direction.

Dream has spent so much energy ordering his pieces to do things they didn't want to do, that he doesn't have enough left to force Ranboo to kill him.

Tubbo steps onto the last square. His clothes transform to the ornate battle attire of the queen, the standard soldier's sword reshaping itself into a wicked battle axe.

He turns around, the skirt flaring along with his turn. And with a smile, Tubbo *leaps*.

He soars all the way across the battlefield, laughing. He orders Drista to go after George, but Tubbo has a few scores to settle so he himself goes for Dream.

He locks blades with the masked bastard, goes for a kick while their arms are busy. Dream jumps it, but he's forced to step back from Tubbo's swing.

Tubbo would never be able to beat Dream alone. But Dream is fighting two battles, parrying Tubbo's powerful swings while simultaneously keeping George safe and it *shows*. He leaves openings, fumbles strikes, meanwhile his pieces keep being dragged off the board.

Dream *screams*, suddenly pushing Tubbo to the defensive.

Tubbo flinches backwards, parrying axe-strike after axe strike. His arms shake, but he uses every trick he's learned; he kicks pebbles towards Dream's eyes, lashes out with his horns, feints and feints and—

The axe is knocked out of Tubbo's hands. It skids away on the battlefield.

Dream swings, Tubbo dodges, ducking and weaving, but a low sweeping kick sends him to the ground.

Dream's axe is held up in the air, like the blade of a guillotine, ready to fall.

Tubbo closes his eyes, but not his senses, and with a few last-minute commands he screams:

“CHECKMATE!”

There is silence on the battlefield. Tubbo slowly opens his eyes back up.

Dream is frozen mid-swing, green threads wrapped around his limbs and neck, originating from the outstretched hand of Exdeh, who smiles, the universe visible in his mouth.

“ **Well done.**”

Tubbo wakes with a gasp once again.

He's still in the Stronghold, Exdeh's ring around him dissolving like paint in water, and he drops to his knees.

"NO!" screams Dream, the ring around him instead tightening and pinning his arms to his chest. "I AM EXDEH'S CHAMPION, YOU CAN'T TAKE THAT FROM—"

" **Enough of that,**" Exdeh declares and Dream goes silent.

Exdeh kneels before Tubbo, extending a puppet-like hand glowing with runes.

" **Tubbo Underscore; by taking my hand you swear to be my Champion, to uphold order and structure, to wield my divine strength in my name, for as long as you remain outside of Death's domain or as long as I deem it,**" the god says, its reptilian eyes open behind golden haloes. A pair of gossamer wings unfurls from its cloak circling them both. "**Do you accept?**"

Tubbo knows his voice will shake if he speaks. So he simply looks the deity straight in its eyes and takes its hand.

" **My name is Clay,**" the god says, directly into Tubbo's mind.

An electric burning strikes Tubbo's eye, the right one, the one that doesn't work right anymore after he got hit with a firework. He hisses in pain, clapping a hand over the eye.

The god vanishes as if it was never there.

"Are you okay?" says Tommy, running to Tubbo's side. "It was so *freaky* , man, you stared at nothing while that ring was around you and—"

"I'm okay, boss man," Tubbo says, taking his hand off his eye, only for Tommy to gasp. "What? What's wrong?"

Tommy fumbles for the backup sword he keeps in his inventory, offering Tubbo the shiny surface.

It's Tubbo's turn to gasp. His right eye doesn't even have a pupil or iris anymore. Just a neon green X extending all the way around it over the white of his sclera.

"It looks fucking poggers," Tommy says, grinning.

"It does, doesn't it?" Tubbo answers, excitement climbing over his throat.

A thump catches both of their attentions. The ring keeping Dream pinned has disappeared, and the man is on his knees, cracks on the stone floor where he decided to punch it.

"Do you have any idea what you have done?" Dream says, voice dangerously calm. He stands, slowly.

“I’d suggest you step away from them, Dream,” Techno says, axe in hand. A newly-healed Foolish is behind him, wielding a sword.

“If I can’t be the one standing on top after all of this, then what’s the point?” Dream says, and Tubbo can feel the leftover divine magic in the masked man rise to the surface. Tubbo internally startles when he realizes he still has that mind-sensing ability Exdeh gave him, and Dream’s mind is— the closest word Tubbo can find is ‘crumbling’.

Then Dream’s hands shine toxic green again, drawing runes in the air that violently disintegrate, one first, then the other. Everyone in the room holds their breath, but nothing happens.

Dream starts laughing. At first quiet, but then his volume rises, his body shaking violently. He *screams* with hollow laughter, burying his hands in his hair.

A spark in Dream’s mind sets Tubbo off, and he shoves himself to stand in between Tommy as Dream explodes into motion. Instinct drives Tubbo to headbutt Dream straight in the face, as hard as he can.

Dream reels back as the mask on his face shatters, the shards of ceramic clinking on the floor.

Tubbo gapes as he sees Dream’s face for the first time, the boyish roundness to it, the wide green eyes, the freckles dusted on the skin. As much of a monster as Dream is, his face is just— normal. Regular. Vaguely pretty in a way that makes it even more forgettable.

Dream’s so out of it he doesn’t attempt to cover his face at all, instead he lets his smile be seen by everyone in the room, a mirthless smile, like the one a skull has.

“If I can’t win, I’ll take you all— ”

Purpled climbs the ladder up the basement. Well, both basements. And both of them were empty. Dream is nowhere to be found.

He curses internally. The *one* fucking thing they were supposed to do in the plan, and they fucked it up! If Dream somehow got out of the house and is on his way to hunt them down—

Purpled heaves himself up the last few rungs, walking into the living room. Ranboo is there, nervously fiddling with the end of his tail.

“He’s not in the house?” Purpled asks.

Ranboo shakes his head, his ears pinned to his head.

“He’s not in the stables either,” says Puffy, hurriedly closing the front door after Phil enters. “He’s gone.”

Purpled hisses a curse. “What the hell are we supposed to do—”

Ranboo gasps, and Purpled turns to look.

There are green runes floating around his neck, like a necklace or a collar. Ranboo's right eye, the green one, is shining a toxic green.

And then the runes shatter. The green in his eye bleeds out, leaving behind bright purple sclera and a white, pupiless eye.

"Ranboo?" Puffy cautiously asks, as if Ranboo was a Ravager ready to charge and not the local nervous wreck.

There are enderman particles coming off of Ranboo now, much more than the ambient particles he normally emits. Almost as if Ranboo was getting ready to teleport, but he *can't* teleport, right? He only has the silk-touch hands from his enderman side.

But Ranboo releases an enraged enderman screech and in a flurry of floating purple motes, he vanishes.

"—down with me!"

Ranboo lands in the stronghold, right behind Dream. His claws close in Dream's hair, drawing a pained gasp from the man, and then he lifts. Dream's hands ineffectually scratch at the claws keeping him aloft, his feet kicking in the air.

A growl, gravelier, deeper than that of an enderman rips out of Ranboo's throat. His jaw widens far past what a human jaw ever could, rows and rows of teeth glinting over a bright purple maw. His fangs close over the back of Dream's neck and *crunch*.

There is blood on Ranboo's tongue, and bone in his mouth. He lets the body drop from his jaw and splat on the floor, motes of white smoke already drifting from it signaling a respawn.

"What the fuck," Tommy breathes, looking at Ranboo with wide eyes.

"Sorry you had to see that," Ranboo says to the four, smiling apologetically.

"What— what was that?!?" Tubbo says.

"I just needed to get back at him for mind-controlling me for so long," Ranboo says, vaguely gesturing at the half-gone body on the floor. "He even made me forget what I am!"

"*What* you are? Aren't you an enderman hybrid?" asks Techno, rather confused, but his axe is at the ready.

"Nope! You know, I never questioned why I had horns and a tail and long ears. Endermen don't have those," Ranboo happily chirps. "No, I'm not an enderman hybrid. At least not fully."

Ranboo teleports on top of the portal, finally able to remember why he always kept ender pearls and blaze rods in his inventory. It's a matter of seconds to turn the rods into powder,

combining the two to form an ender eye.

“I am an ender dragon hybrid,” Ranboo says, placing the last eye in the portal and stars shine inside the frame. “And I am going home.”

And with that, Ranboo jumps into the portal.

Hundreds of thousands of blocks away, the magical oath keeping the Egg unable to hurt anyone shatters into nothingness as well.

Chapter End Notes

isdfskdfj I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR SO LONG TO DROP THIS BOMBSHELL, YALL HAVE NO FUCKING IDEA HOW MUCH I HAVE BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS

Thank RTGame's 5D chess video and @picckl on twitter's Checkmate AU for giving me the idea of having Tubbo's trial be a chess game.

Anyyyyways! I chose which pieces would be black and which would be white by how easy or difficult they would have been for Dream to manipulate/bring to his side at that specific point in time, hence why Phil and Ranboo are black pieces. Though I did put Wilbur as the white king bc it felt right, even though the whole "my savior" business should have put him on the other side.

Also four chapters left!!!! (technically three, since the last one is an epilogue so--)

Also ChaoticSparklez, I am awaiting your firstborn as payment, just like you promised

^ ^
—

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Ranboo opens his eyes to a starless sky.

The cold, dry air envelops him as if it was a treasured blanket. It feels right. He's home.

The flap of great wings reaches his ears, and Ranboo looks upward to see a great black dragon, descending towards him. Lines of bright purple make their way across the dragon's skin as it transforms, shrinking into a more human-like appearance.

And alighting with great black wings is a woman with horns the same shape as Ranboo's, skin and hair as dark as the void, and solid, glowing purple eyes. She's dressed in an intricately-woven tunic the color of endstone, shimmering green details that remind Ranboo of ender eyes turning the simple garment into one fit for royalty. On her brow rests a white circlet that glows softly, as if it was made from end rods.

She seems very familiar. Ranboo can't exactly remember who she is.

"Oh, my baby," she says, surging forward to engulf Ranboo in a hug. For the first time in his life, Ranboo is not the tallest person in a hug and it makes him feel small. Young. Like a child. It's nice.

"Hi mom," Ranboo says, pressing himself closer to her.

"I missed you so, so much," she says, pulling back to look at him. "How much you've grown."

"Let us go home," she says, taking his hand and pulling him forward.

Ranboo lets himself be led, gasping once he sees where they're going. A gargantuan collection of towers, made of chiseled endstone and purpur blocks, with open-air pavilions at the top where endermen converse with each other, floating crystals spilling light into the dark like lighthouses.

He's brought out of his amazement by the worried frown on his mother's face. "Ranboo, do you not remember your home?"

Ranboo's ears fold back against his head.

"No! No, it's okay, Ranran," his mother says, turning to cradle Ranboo's head in her hands. "We knew from the start that traveling through the Inbetween would probably damage your memories."

Her frown deepens even further. "Where are your wings? They should have come through by now..."

"Wings?" Ranboo asks, his eyes widening.

His mother's eyes suddenly narrow into slits, her nostrils flaring as she exhales purple acid breath. "That damned deity's power is keeping your wings trapped inside your own body."

"What?"

"Was it not enough to trap us within a crumbling dimension? Was it not enough to doom thousands of my subjects, his subjects, into being violently torn from the hivemind?!?" A growl emanates deep within her chest. "He will pay for what he's done!"

His mother snarls, her fangs bared, form flickering between her dragon self and more enderman-like appearance.

Ranboo takes a step back. He's suddenly reminded that his mother is a demigod.

She notices his distress, smoothing her expression back into calmness. "I'm sorry, Ranran," she says.

"It's okay," Ranboo answers.

"Come," she says, effortlessly scooping him up into her arms and opening her wings wide. "We'll get that curse off of you."

Ranboo doesn't say anything, instead choosing to curl up further into her arms, smiling softly as she takes flight.

"SHIT!" Tommy swears, dodging the enraged swipe of an enderman. He grabs a handful of snow and throws it at the enderman, hoping the burn of the frozen water is enough to get it off his back for a moment. It works.

"Why the hell are they attacking us?!?" Tubbo shouts, ducking as another enderman tries biting a chunk out of him.

"The portal's open now," grunts Techno, cleanly slicing an enderman's head off of its body. "All the endermen are back in the Dragon Queen's hivemind and she hates us."

"It's more likely she's just on the side of the Egg," says Foolish, magically creating water around them so the endermen can't teleport close. The glow in his fingertips is much fainter than before; he's running out of magic. "I can see the house—! Oh no."

Tommy turns, looking towards the house too. His breath catches in his throat: he can see fire and fighting.

Wordlessly, all four of them sprint towards the house, weapons at the ready.

Tommy sees Punz swinging an axe at Puffy, who's holding her own admirably well. Purpled is struggling a little against Hannah as her flowers keep popping up from the ground and tangling his legs.

Tommy immediately spots a red haze starting to come from the open buds of Hannah's flowers, and he curses. Thankfully everyone who was in the house is wearing the gas masks that Tubbo and Fundy made, but that means Tommy's group is now absolutely vulnerable to bloodvines growing in their lungs.

Techno, Foolish, and Tubbo take their bows out of their inventories. As much as Tommy staked L'Manburg's freedom in a bow duel, he's not the best with a bow. He takes the bow out of his inventory, notching an arrow, and curses once the arrow whizzes past Hannah's head.

The arrow barrage is distraction enough for Purpled to stab Hannah through the arm, forcing her to retreat.

"Psst!" says Fundy's voice and all four of them jump. "Sorry! Invis pot."

"Fucking hell Fundy you scared the shit out of me!" hisses Tommy.

"Sorry," he says, and Tommy can finally spot the footsteps in the snow and the swirling particles coming off of him. "Here, take this!"

Fundy shoves the four gas masks into each of their hands, and none waste a single moment putting them on. "I'm going to help Phil get all the valuables out. There are bloodvines already growing in the basement, we're gonna have to leave the house."

Tommy glances at Techno, whose grip on his bow is making his knuckles white.

"Wraith said that our best bet is going to the Nether, so just keep the eggheads busy while we get all the stuff out!" Fundy says, before leaving, his footsteps appearing over the snow.

"You heard him!" says Foolish, taking a sword out of his inventory, his voice muffled by the gas mask.

Tommy nods, summoning his spear from his inventory, and runs forward.

Immediately Jack jumps into his way, swinging a sword at Tommy's neck. He uses his spear to parry the blow, making the best of the spear's longer range to push the point forward and into Jack's shoulder.

It reminds Tommy a little of sparring sessions in Pogtopia. Back then he and Jack had been more or less evenly matched. But now?

Tommy twists the tip as Jack screams, cutting through muscle as his arm goes limp, dropping the sword.

"Stop! It hurts!" says Jack, and Tommy freezes.

"Jack?" Tommy says, drawing his spear back. "Are you—"

The wound at his shoulder widens, a tendril of red snapping forward and curling around the wood of Tommy's spear.

"FUCK," Tommy screams, tugging the spear free on instinct. The tendril gets tugged out too, taking with it Jack's arm. It splats onto the ground with a wet plop.

"Shit. I'm so sorry Jack," Tommy says, bile rising in his throat because of the bloody mess at his feet. "I'm so fucking sorry—!"

"No you're not!" screams Jack, holding his bloody shoulder as more and more tendrils bloom from the hole where his arm used to be. "If you were, you wouldn't be here fighting me!"

Tommy has to dodge as the tendrils lash out towards him, cutting them with the sharp tip of his spear and stepping around the cut chunks of bloodvine that thrash on the floor, trying to reach out for his feet. He gets a few shallow cuts from Jack's sword on his arms.

Tommy grits his teeth and flares out his wings, catching Jack by surprise. Jack instinctively steps back, out of sword range but not out of spear range, so Tommy takes the opportunity and swings the blunt end of his spear at Jack's head. He crumples to the floor, unconscious, the bloodvines inside of him furiously twitching and attempting to puppet his body.

Tommy doesn't have enough time to make sure Jack is okay because he throws himself aside as a trident strikes the ground where stood a second ago. The trident flies back to the hand of Sam, standing menacingly, as he exhales red-tinged smoke.

Shifting his stance, Tommy dips into his inventory and crashes two splash potions, one of speed and the other of strength, into the ground. He's gonna need them.

Sam throws the trident again, and Tommy smacks it out of the way with his spear, taking the opening to rush towards the creeper hybrid, managing to score a shallow cut across Sam's chest. The trident flies back into Sam's hand and he slashes down with it, catching the tip of Tommy's spear between the prongs and twisting. Tommy cries out as his wrist twists with it too.

A hiss emanates deep in Sam's chest, the smoke coming from him thickening, as he starts flashing white.

He's going to blow up, Tommy realizes, cold horror running down his spine. He doesn't have enough time to get out of the blast, he's out of ender pearls because of the End portal, it's either dying or—

Tommy drops the spear, summons his sword out of his inventory, and slashes Sam's neck.

Sam drops like a marionette with cut strings, wisps of white respawn smoke coming from his corpse.

Tommy forces his gaze away, looking towards the house.

Wraith is taking shots at Lazar from within the blazing house, HBomb's corpse strewn in the snow, already halfway gone through respawn, arrows sticking out of him like a hedgehog's quills. Wraith is bleeding in multiple places, the most worrying a cut on their forehead streaming blood down their face.

Tommy's ears are ringing. He can smell blood and smoke. His breaths are loud through the gas mask's filter. He robotically picks up his spear from the floor.

A scream rips Tommy back into reality as one of the walls of the house collapses. That was Fundy's voice.

His legs are moving before he can process it, bursting into the house through the already-broken door. He's glad he's wearing a gas mask, because even through it the smell of smoke is overwhelming, the soot making his eyes water.

He ignores it, sprinting through the living room and climbing towards the second floor, reaching Techno's bedroom.

He finds Phil trying to desperately move a burning beam from Fundy, who's pinned under it. Tommy summons his axe and both of them make quick work chopping the wood. However, it's abundantly clear that Fundy's leg is broken, facing a direction it shouldn't. Using a healing or regen pot is not an option until they reset it.

"Tommy, you have to get out of here!" Phil shouts, slinging one of Fundy's arms over his shoulder and helping the fox hybrid stand.

"Absolutely fucking not," Tommy says, magically creating water to put out the path out of the house.

"You have wings that still work, mate!" Phil says, hobbling along with his grandson towards the door. "Feathers are flammable as fuck!"

Yeah, Tommy completely fucking forgot about that. "Too bad, I'm already here. So hurry the fuck up before—"

Tommy throws himself at the floor as a blast of fire sails over his head, Fundy tackling Phil onto the floor at the last second. The heat scorches through, making his armor uncomfortably warm.

"Damn! I thought I got you," says Sapnap, hands shining bright with cracks of light, smoke pouring out his fanged mouth, blaze heritage in full display. His eyes, still that eerie red of the Egg, shine with sadistic glee.

"Phil, get Fundy the fuck out of here," says Tommy, drawing his spear despite his wrist's protests. He shifts into a fighting stance, the knowledge that he has never bested Sapnap resting heavily on his mind.

"Absolutely not," Phil says, drawing a crossbow. "I'm not going to leave you alone again."

Tommy swallows down the mess of emotions that rise in his chest at Phil's words. Instead, he grits his teeth and charges at Sapnap.

Sapnap grins, lashing out with his axe and forcing Tommy back, the axe clanging against his chest plate sure to leave a bruise. He blasts fire into the ground, the walls, the ceiling, and it all is set aflame.

Tommy curses, drawing magic from his rapidly-dwindling reserves and creating water to put out as much of the fire as he can.

The stream of water splashes Sapnap, who curses and claps a hand over the now-steaming water burns.

Netherborn hybrids are hurt by water, Tommy remembers.

So he breathes in and lunges back at Sapnap, using his speed to his advantage, ducking around heavy axe strikes and fire blasts. Phil's arrows help keep Sapnap busy enough, and he can tell Sapnap's getting frustrated at Tommy's evasiveness, his strikes getting wilder and wilder.

And then Tommy finds an opening. He sneaks the tip of his spear under Sapnap's axe and pushes Sapnap's arm aside. He draws his magic into his fingers and pushes every little bit left of it into a blast of water straight to Sapnap's face.

Sapnap screams, dropping the axe and sinking to the floor, hands covering his face.

"GO!" Tommy screams, running towards Fundy and slinging his other arm over his shoulders. All three of them sprint as best they can out the door not a second too soon.

The cabin collapses behind them. Tommy wants to desperately check his comm to see if Sapnap made it out or not, see if all the vibrating notifications are death messages or normal ones, but he's knocked out of his mind as he's hit across the face.

Tommy stumbles, raising his head to see a smug Antfrost just as his gas mask falls to pieces. Panicking, Tommy puts Tubbo's bandanna around his mouth, but it's charred on the edges and has a few holes, now sticky with blood, so he tries to breathe as little as possible.

"DON'T TOUCH MY SON YOU ASSHOLE!" screams Phil, and his eyes turn a solid black. He springs forward, flapping his wings, and closes a hand around Ant's wrist.

Ant screams as the skin, then muscle, then bone starts disintegrating into grey flakes of dust, climbing over his arm and neck and face and—

Tommy forces himself to look away as Ant's screams fade. He starts walking forward as fast as he can, in the direction of the Nether portal. Techno is beside the Nether portal, with three corpses around him he briefly recognizes as Alyssa, Ponk, and Punz.

Techno is fighting Quackity, who is already bleeding and one of his eyes is hanging outside of his skull held only by bloodvines. The piglin hybrid sweeps Quackity's legs out from under him, raising his axe to deal the final blow.

"DON'T KILL HIM!" Tommy screams, stopping Techno from swinging down. "HE'LL BE ON HIS LAST LIFE!"

Techno understands that if he does kill him now, Quackity will be as good as dead; with only one life left, their method of cleansing the bloodvines with soulfire will simply kill Quackity permanently.

So instead, Techno grabs Quackity by the arm and flings him a good ten meters away.

Tommy sinks to his knees. He used the last of his air to save Quackity's life, and now he struggles to not breathe in. The memories of waking up drowning in the freezing waters of Logsted crawl out of the dark hole in his mind, not helped at all by the cold of the snow creeping past his armor.

Hands take the bandanna away, and Tommy panics before he feels the edges of a gas mask press into his face. He looks up to see Phil's bare face looking down at him, and Tommy realizes that it's *Phil's* gas mask..

"Fundy," Phil says, eyes solemn. "Reach out to your grandmother, okay? She'll hear you out."

"What?" Fundy says, voice gritted from pain.

"I'll buy all of you some time," Phil says, dumping his entire inventory out for Tommy to scramble to try and pick up. "Tell Techno I'm sorry, okay?"

"Wait, dad," Tommy says, the name slipping out without his permission. Phil only smiles, turning around towards the house. "DAD!"

Phil breaks into a run, aided by his charred, torn wings, sprinting past a retreating Puffy, Foolish, Wraith, Purpled, and Tubbo, all five of them in different levels of badly hurt, all of them barely outrunning the infected.

A ghostly outline appears around his wings, filling the torn and ragged parts until they look pristine once again, flaring out to their full span.

Black roses, *wither* roses bloom at Phil's feet, the scent of sweet rot and old stone flooding around them. Black veins rise along his skin, crows start flying around him, coming out to storm like a hurricane of black feathers.

"PHIL!" screams Techno, running towards him, but he's too far away to reach.

Phil looks back, bloodvines already crawling out of his throat, one of his eyes a bright red, the other still a solid black, and with a burst of eldritch magic, a forest grows.

Tall, spindly trees with crackly black bark rise from the ground, their dark thorny roots covering the snow until it cannot be seen. Weeping obsidian leaves sprout from the branches, dripping purple onto the ground in an acidic mist.

There is silence.

Ranboo wakes up slowly, taking time to stretch his limbs. His wings stretch alongside him and he jawns wide, blinking as he sits up in his soft nest.

His back still aches a little from his wings busting through, but it's nothing compared to what it once was. He's also had to get used to the new ridges running down his spine and over his

tail. He's also startled himself more than once by breathing dragon's breath without meaning to.

He gingerly steps outside of his nest, standing before his mirror and dressing in the fine silk suit and ender-rod jewelry that used to be his. Is his.

Despite his best efforts, he hasn't been able to settle down and truly feel like this place is his home. When he tries, all he can think of is showing Tubbo the big collection of weapons in the armory and going for flights with Tommy. He wants to go back.

His mom doesn't want him to. They've fought about it more than once.

She had told him that the End Islands, without the duty of upkeep that Exdeh should have done instead of gallivanting off into the Overworld, are falling into the void, slowly but surely killing endermen by the hundreds. She'd agreed to send him into the Inbetween as a last resort.

The victory of his brother is practically guaranteed now, she'd said. That once the Egg wins he'll steal Exdeh's powers from him and restore the End to what it once was.

Ranboo doesn't want to see his friends die, but at the same time, his endermen subjects are trusting that he'll do the best for them.

The burning of tears snaps Ranboo out of his thoughts, and he hastily wipes them off his cheeks with his sleeve. He loves his mom and his kingdom. But he also loves Tubbo and Tommy, and he could grow to love the others, too.

He can't keep going like this. There has to be a way to have both, and Ranboo knows that he won't find it by staying here.

He exhales a steadying breath, the person in the mirror looking back with newfound determination. He takes off his jewelry, reaching into his closet for a set of sturdier pants and a looser white shirt. He digs into his inventory and pulls out his Memory Book, ripping out a page to write a note to his mother.

He knows the main portal back into the Overworld is closed, courtesy of his mother, so there's only one other way out.

Unfurling his wings, he flies out of his room, a chamber inside the obsidian pillars, heading for the northernmost pillar. That's where the royal library is.

He alights a little clumsily at the entrance, still unused to flying, and greets the librarian before heading to the more restricted section of it. He's following hazy, half-there memories as he pulls out a black-and-white book with a spiral on the cover.

It's written in Galactic, the language of spell and the Void, which Ranboo doesn't know, but he doesn't need to. He flips pages until he finds the array of runes he needs.

Then comes the hard part. With his sharp claws, he carves the design into his arm, stifling sounds of pain until it's done. He hurriedly stuffs the book back in its place, flying out of the

library as fast as he can.

He heads towards the edge of the island, alighting a few steps from the edge. He looks down at the Void.

Wings beat behind him and Ranboo turns to see his mom land close.

"Ranboo, what are you doing?" she pleads, her hands open and reaching towards him.

"I'm sorry mom. I gotta go. But I promise you, I'll find a way to save the Overworld and the End," Ranboo says, smiling sadly. "I love you. See you soon."

"RANBOO!"

Her scream is the last thing Ranboo hears as he throws himself into the abyss. The void reaches back for him, the runes on his arm glowing white as they painfully activate.

When he opens his eyes, he's standing in the middle of a white castle. Chunks of it are floating in the air as if parts suddenly disappeared from existence and the rest didn't get the memo. He looks up at the sky and finds even more castle, simply a wall with grand windows opening into another corridor. He looks to his right and finds a corridor that goes up at a sharp angle, to his left and he sees the inside of a domed roof.

Curiously, he heads to the corridor that goes at an angle and gasps as he steps into it. The gravity changes, so he's standing in a horizontal corridor and the chamber he'd been in before is now the one going up at a sharp angle.

"Trespasser," hisses a voice to Ranboo's back, and he turns to see a featureless, mannequin-like version of himself. "To pass through all must pay a toll."

"What– what's the price?" Ranboo stammers.

His eerie, blank twin tilts its head as if considering.

"Don't fall for it!" shouts another voice behind Ranboo, and he turns to see–

"Karl?!?" Ranboo says, mouth open wide. He watches as the brown-haired shapeshifter runs to stand between Ranboo and his creepy double.

"Become my vessel, and I'll let you both go," the Inbetween says.

"Ranboo, don't," Karl warns, looking nervously at him. "If you do, you'll be forced to time travel to all these weird places and be in the center of all these stories and you'll die, again and again and again at the end of them–"

"You're its Champion right now, Karl?" Ranboo says, waiting until Karl nods. "Then I agree to become your Champion, Inbetween, only if when I time-travel Karl comes with me."

The Inbetween is silent for a second.

"You can say no, and I'll find a way to sneak you out, I've done it before—" says Karl.

"No," says Ranboo, shaking his head. "You'll still be forced to time travel alone if you say no, right? So if I agree, we won't be going through that alone."

"I'll say yes if you're okay with that," says Ranboo, smiling awkwardly, but not unkindly. "But I could also say yes and time travel on my own if you don't want to—"

"You... you would do that?" Karl says, awed. "I've barely even met you and you're okay with dying a bunch just so I won't be alone?"

"Yeah," Ranboo answers.

"I'm not leaving you alone if you say yes to the Inbetween," says Karl. "I'll keep time traveling with you."

The other Ranboo suddenly smiles, its mouth opening into a wide, black-and-white grin.

"So it shall be."

Techno walks the path back towards the Bastion as if he was underwater.

The seven remaining people of their group walk alongside him in somber silence, only broken by the ambient crackling of the Nether, as they head into the tunnel that serves as the entrance to the Bastion.

Wraith levitates forward, conversing quietly with the guards. Techno simply lets time fall from his fingers as Wraith negotiates the entrance of five unknown overworlders. It's a testament to how trusted Wraith is that the guards move to let them through.

Techno can't concentrate on the gasps of wonder from the newcomers as the Bastion comes into view. His thoughts, his voices, are loud and he can't tell which is which. He lets himself be led into the Bastion's courtyard where the Tribe is already gathered.

Wraith and Tommy tell what happened to an attentive audience, slowly eliciting worried murmurs from the crowd. Techno shoves himself back into awareness once he hears the worried Voice of the Quartz Tribe, from the Nether Wastes, tell of slowly spreading red roots, bleaching sections of the Nether into a blinding white.

"This cannot go on," Techno says, drawing all gazes at him. He ignores it and walks to the center of the courtyard.

"The longer we spend here doing nothing, the Egg gets stronger, gains vessels, evolves," Techno says, addressing the piglin unflinchingly. "It has already breached into the Nether. If the Overworld falls, Piglin-kind will follow."

"So what do you suggest to do, Champion of Chaos?" asks Matee, the old piglin matriarch.

"We strike the Egg down. Once and for all."

Chapter End Notes

AAAAA NEXT CHAPTER IS THE FINALE!!!!

And after that it is a short epilogue! I have everything already written down, though I don't know if I should post the epilogue the same day as the last chapter or wait.

Anyways!!! The Inbetween! Surprise motherfuckers! I've always like the explanation that Ranboo's white color came from the Inbetween and not from whatever his other hybrid half is. And I also wanted to give Karl a little bit of spotlight!

ANYWAYS! I love to hear what you guys think! Even if it's incoherent keysmashing, please leave comments! They are my fuel and I will consume them gladly.

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Fundy finishes polishing his new netherite sword, exhaling shakily. He catches his reflection in the metal, his black sclera staring back at him. His natural black eyes match the color, making him look as if his eyes were solid black. He hasn't gotten used to them yet.

He remembers when he'd gotten them. He'd taken a potion of poison, on purpose getting as close to death as he could without killing himself, and reached out to his grandmother.

She'd answered.

'I'll agree to make you my Champion if you promise me one thing,' she said, her many feathered wings gently fluttering as she held him in her palms. 'The Revive Book isn't letting spirits pass through to the afterlife, keeping them in limbo, as there is a possibility for them to return to the living world.'

She'd looked at him with sadness in her face. She said: 'Dream has already memorized the text. I need you to destroy the book, and kill him.'

Fundy exhales shakily, and he notices his reflection is shaking. No, it's his hands that are shaking. He shoves the sword back into his inventory and tries to distract himself from the fact he'll have to kill his ex-fiance and with him the only possibility of his dad being brought back to life.

He walks out of the room he's using in the Bastion, uncomfortable with the heat that greets him once he steps out. A horn blares and Fundy recognizes it.

He goes to the courtyard, where everyone else is waiting. Techno's hoof taps rhythmically on the floor, clearly wanting to put his plan into action after having to wait a week for it to be ready.

Everyone is wearing brand-new, piglin-forged sets of netherite armor, courtesy of Anala and Tommy. Fundy had marveled at how *easy* it is to move in them compared to crafting table armor. And he didn't miss the little details that marked each armor as custom-made, like the space on his helmet so his ears could comfortably fit, or the small green engravings on Tubbo's armor, or how Foolish's armor is the lightest of them all as his golden skin is already pretty good armor in and of itself.

He sits beside Purpled, his red-pupiled eyes peeking out from his crossed arms as he rests on leaning on a table.

"It's showtime, huh?" Fundy says, not hiding how his tail is puffed up like a bottle brush.

Purpled makes a tired noise, incorporating himself and dragging his hands over his face, before holding his head in his palms. "I wish they'd shut up about it. They're so *loud*."

"Ooof," Fundy says, patting Purpled's back comfortingly.

"Alright, everyone pay attention!" says Puffy, making the Overworlders perk up. "Let's go over the plan one last time."

"Fundy, Purpled, Tommy, Tubbo, Foolish and Puffy are in the frontal assault team," says Techno, pointing to each in time. "We know where the Egg is. Go make it into an omelet."

All six of them cheer, waving their weapons in the air.

"Wraith and I are goin' to capture the spawn-point," Techno continues, Wraith nodding solemnly. "We destroy any beds and then clear out spawn so any soul-fire-roasted eggheads don't get immediately re-infected on respawn. Tubbo?"

"Right," he says, closing his eyes. Green runes shine around his hands, and when he opens his eyes, the X one is shining brightly. "I've got the coordinates of all the beds with set spawn-points. Sending them now."

Wraith and Techno's communicators buzz.

"Right, does everybody have their soul-fire enchanted weapons? Their soul-sand TnT? Gas masks?" everybody nods as she lists the items. "The list of who has how many lives?"

Fundy thinks back on it. Jack and Phil are the only ones on the no-kill list since they both have one life remaining. The rest are fair game as long as they are killed by soul-fire, and with the soul-fire enchantment they'd found in the Stronghold books, things should be much easier on that front.

"Then let's go," she says.

Fundy stands up from his seat.

He glances and waits patiently as a few piglin get closer and say their goodbyes to Tommy and Wraith. Fundy is a little jealous that Tommy's found a better family than the one they had. He shakes those thoughts out of his head. If anyone deserves a nice family after all the shit they've been through, it's Tommy.

Only thing they have to do is survive this.

Tubbo looks at the newly-made portal with determination, axe in hand. If his powers are right, and he made sure they were, this should spawn them directly in the cave system the Egg is in.

"Ready?" Puffy says, and all of them nod. "GO!"

She jumps into the portal first, all of them following. It spits them out into a mineshaft crawling with bloodvines that come alive like grasping hands.

Acting fast, Tubbo shatters a fire resistance pot on the ground while Tommy pulls soul sand out of his inventory and places it in a protective circle around the portal. Fundy and Purpled, in their own fire pot-soul sand duo, finish the other half of the protective ring before lighting it on fire. Foolish and Puffy finish setting soul-fire on the top of the portal.

Now for the dangerous part. Tubbo pulls the soul-sand TnT out of his inventory and lights it. He waits until the last second to grab it and throw it towards the mass of crawling vines trying to stand in their way.

It explodes, the vines hissing as they wilt and fall to the floor in messes of thrashing, greying, plant matter.

Now the training they did in the week of preparation kicks in: Tommy lights his TnT, throwing it as Tubbo lights his next one, both falling into a rhythm of light-throw-light-throw, clearing a path towards the Egg.

Fundy and Purpled are doing the same in the other direction of the tunnel, their explosions echoing behind them.

"There's someone coming from the side!" warns Foolish, drawing his bow.

The block of stone beside them falls away into someone's inventory, only for that someone to be shot right in the head by a soul-sand tipped arrow followed by a fire charge thrown by Puffy.

Tubbo recognizes Lazar's scream but he doesn't turn to watch anymore. He has to trust Puffy and Foolish will call for help when they need it.

The sounds of fighting mix with the blasts of TnT as Tubbo wades over a layer of dying bloodvines. An arrow flies through the darkness between Tubbo's and Tommy's explosions, hitting Tubbo's armored horns.

"INCOMING AT THE FRONT!" Tommy screams, pulling out his spear and running forward, trusting that Tubbo won't hit him in the back with TnT.

Instead, Tubbo pulls out his crossbow and plays support, keeping Tommy's opponents busy.

He can see Alyssa's blond hair in the darkness as both of them get stuck in a bow duel, while Tommy engages Hbomb.

There are more people hidden within the bloodvines of the tunnel, but they are forced to stand back and take potshots at both of them.

That was the plan: by fighting inside a cave, the eggheads can't take advantage of their numbers and instead are forced to file in two-by-two's.

That doesn't mean they are idle. Tubbo can see through the red that the others are working to widen the hole and dig tunnels at the sides.

"DIVE," yells Tubbo, Tommy doesn't acknowledge the codeword, but that's part of the maneuver.

Tubbo sets three TnT on the ground and lights all three. At the last second, Tommy throws an enderpearl backwards as Tubbo throws the first TnT, landing beside Tubbo and helping him throw the other two.

The explosions are accompanied by their comms vibrating twice. Lazar and Alyssa's burning bodies hit the ground.

Tubbo and Tommy press their advantage, the tunnel now wide enough for both of them to engage in melee, Tubbo drawing his axe from his inventory.

Connor jumps out of the darkness, bloodvines wrapped around his blue-dyed quills, and Tubbo lashes out with his axe, the scraping of metal against metal drawing blue sparks from Tubbo's blade. Connor doesn't seem to care, his quills raising with aggression as he presses his sword forward.

Tommy lashes out with his spear, managing to nick a few quills from Connor's head, setting the rest on fire, before he's forced to step back to parry Vikkstar's swords.

Meanwhile, arrows come from the darkness, the bloodvines swiping at their feet and trying to regain the terrain lost.

Tubbo huffs, feinting so Connor tries to stab forward, which gives Tubbo a clear shot to throw a poison potion at the darkness. The arrows stop coming, the people there scrambling to get milk to cure it.

Tommy yells, dodging Vikkstar's dual-wielded swords, but he's having trouble actually landing hits, the cave too small for three people and a spear-wielder.

"SWITCH!" Tubbo yells, as Tommy pivots and begins attacking Connor instead. Against a single sword, Tommy's faring much better, his aggressive fighting style quickly overwhelming the hedgehog hybrid.

Tubbo's much more defensive fighting style is not much better against Vikkstar's dual-wielding, but he only has to resist until Tommy deals with Connor.

"INCOMING AT THE BACK!" yells Purpled, the sounds of TnT ceasing from their side and instead the sounds of fighting starting.

Tubbo grits his teeth, drawing his shield from his inventory and shifting his stance as he blocks Vikk's strikes.

Then a flash of blue as Tommy finally manages to stab Connor through the stomach, who drops to the ground.

“PONK DOWN!” screams Fundy from behind them.

Tubbo grins savagely, keeping Vikkstar busy while Tommy winds up his strike and stabs Vikkstar in the back.

"They're retreating!" shouts Puffy. "Press the advantage!"

Fundy and Purpled come from the back towards the front, all four of them lighting TnT and throwing it forward in turns, like a well-oiled machine, Puffy and Foolish guarding so they don't get surprised.

"They're probably waiting near the chamber where the Egg is," Puffy says, yelling over the sound of explosions. "Be ready to start attacking once the room widens. We won't let the bigger room be their advantage!"

"Aye captain!" All five of them answer, the joke landing as Puffy snorts despite the situation.

"Alright then land-lubbers!" she says, taking on a thick sailor's accent. "Let's crack this Egg!"

“Seven!” shouts Wraith, spotting the re-spawning Niki, quickly placing a soul-fire protection ring around her regenerating body and setting it on fire.

Techno grunts his acknowledgment, violently removing an infected sheep's head from its body.

Quickly, three more sheep take their place, along with a pair of zombies and a wolf from Techno's wolf army, all of them with twitching vines coming out of their bodies.

None of them are much of a threat on their own, but there are *hundreds* of them, from barnyard animals to red-covered creepers, shambling towards the spawn, with only Techno and Wraith to stop them.

Wraith spots a bloodvine trying to punch through the quickly-erected walls around the spawn. They draw a soul-sand block from their inventory, taking a deep breath before moving their gas mask aside and breathing a fire charge through the soul sand and into the ground before the wall. The blue fire charge impacts the ground, charring the bloodvine into dust.

Floating high above, Wraith places their gas mask back on their face before drawing their crossbow and taking potshots at the infected creepers trying to blow holes into their walls. A speck of bright neon green draws Wraith's attention.

"DREAM INCOMING!" shouts Wraith.

Techno practically growls, kicking a skeleton and making it burst into a shower of bones, before climbing back up to the top of the walls. Dream throws an enderpearl over the walls, landing right in the middle of spawn.

Techno jumps off the wall, axe at the ready, parrying Dream's strike just in time to stop him from sinking *Nightmare* into the slowly-regenerating body of Connor.

"What the hell do you think you're doin', you homeless green teletubby," Techno snarls, kicking at Dream, who laughs and dodges.

"Reclaiming what's mine!" he answers, manically laughing as he tries to chop Lazar's head clean off his body, forcing Techno to try and thwart Dream's twisted game of whack-a-mole. "*You* are the only one strong enough to stop me, and once you're out of the way, it'll be easy to kill the Egg after those idiots get *themselves* killed trying to stop it!"

"How're you so sure they're goin' to fail?" says Techno, lunging as Dream goes after a newly-respawning Niki.

"They need all four Champions there," Dream gleefully informs, catching Techno's axe strike with his shield. "And you are here!"

"I sure am here," Techno says, a hint of humour entering his tone as he yanks his axe free from Dream's shield. "But are you *sure* they're goin' to fail?"

"What are you—" Dream cuts himself off, spotting Techno's eyes through his modified boar-skull gas mask. "Your eyes are blank."

Techno laughs.

"You *gave up* being the Champion of Chaos?" says Dream, so befuddled he forgets to attack. "Willingly?"

"Temporarily," Techno says, grinning. "But, I mean I wasn't usin' the Blood God's powers much anyway."

"You— YOU—!" Dream screams, wielding his axe and attacking wildly, forcing Techno into the offensive.

That's when Techno draws his hidden ace from his inventory.

An obsidian shield fizzles into existence, a boar carved in gold at the front. Ordinarily, any weapon made of obsidian would be too heavy to wield, even for someone as strong Techno.

But Tommy found the solution. Tempering the weapons in strenght potions instead of water or oil gave the wielder that potion's effect as long as the weapon is in their hands.

Techno grins wider as the rush of strength climbs into his veins, his axe poised to kill.

Fighting Dream is an old song and dance. They've sparred multiple times, both of them far too skilled to find any other opponent a good training partner. But that also means they know each other's moves too well: Dream dodges Techno's strikes as easily as breathing, and Techno blocks Dream's slices as easy as blinking.

The edge the shield's strength potion gives Techno is only enough to make up for his tiredness, Dream completely rested while he's been forced to fight hundreds of infected mobs.

They're at a stalemate, one Wraith can't help with since they are already struggling to keep the horde of infected mobs at bay.

Dream suddenly stumbles and Techno takes the opening, digging his axe into Dream's hip, cleanly removing his left leg from his body.

Techno looks down and finds a still-regenerating Niki holding Dream's ankle in her hand.

Techno's eyebrows climb up to his hairline. Re-spawning is one of the most painful things anyone can ever do, most passing out throughout the whole thing. For someone to keep themselves conscious through the pain is difficult, but to keep themselves aware enough to follow the flow of a fight, wait for the perfect moment and then grab an ankle tight enough to make a fully armored person stumble?

Techno nods toward Niki with a newfound respect for the pink-haired woman.

Niki does an eye-smile, the skin around her mouth not yet regenerated, and closes her eyes, falling into a well-deserved sleep.

Dream is laying on the ground, an empty bottle of healing potion thrown on the floor beside him. It's done enough to stop his stump from bleeding, but that is it.

"C'mon Techno," says Dream, glaring towards his greatest rival. "Kill me."

"No," Techno says. "It's not my place. There's someone else who will get to do that."

And with those words, Techno slams the blunt end of his axe into Dream's head, effectively knocking him out.

Tommy's breath catches once the tunnel begins widening, red light coming through the cracks in the stone.

"Last volley!" screams Puffy, readying her crossbow. "Drink your potions!"

Tommy lights his last piece of TnT, throwing it and waiting for it to blow before summoning his shield and downing potions of strength, speed, and regeneration in quick succession. All six of them interlock shields in a turtle formation (thanks for the training, Techno) before entering the chamber.

Immediately they are caught in a rain of arrows that clank harmlessly against their shields.

Tommy peeks through the gaps in the shields, quickly scanning the chamber. Eleven people and a demigod against Tommy's group of eight; bad odds but much better than before.

They break their turtle-shell formation as Sam, Punz and Sapnap rush them, Ant, Phil and Quackity forming a firing squad at the back of the bloodvine-covered chamber.

Puffy breaks off to face against Punz, Purpled chooses to take Sam as his enemy, and Foolish goes after Sapnap. Fundy uses the confusion to drink an invis pot and slip away, leaving

Tommy and Tubbo to run towards the firing squad.

Quackity becomes Tommy's target, blocking his spear with his shield and trying to force Tommy back into crossbow firing range. Quackity has always been a good enough fighter, but Tommy has sparred with him before and knows his weaknesses.

Tommy purposefully leaves an opening and catches the second where Quackity, ever the gambler, takes it, switching his shield for an axe. Tommy presses forward, using Quackity's blind spot where his eye used to be to his advantage, digging the tip of his spear into the underside of Quackity's jaw and straight into his brain, knocking a few teeth out in the process.

Tommy has to throw himself back as Phil lashes out with his sword. His wings snap out, scattering a cloud of red spores.

"I got it!" says Foolish, his gold skin still smoking from Sapnap's fire, engaging Phil.

"Thanks!" yells back Tommy, quickly taking stock of the situation, and putting pressure on a cut on his leg he hadn't noticed getting.

Sapnap's dead on the ground, skull split open by an anvil that Foolish probably created above him and then let drop.

Purpled is finishing up with Sam, the creeper-hybrid bleeding red flowers from multiple wounds. Puffy is struggling against Punz.

Jack is fighting Tubbo, the goat hybrid at a distinct disadvantage since he can't go in for the kill.

In the back, Tommy spots both Hannah and George, who are producing a veritable cloud of spores. Tommy realizes that they're playing the long game, making so many spores that the filters in their gas masks will get clogged and fail. Shit.

"FUNDY, IS IT READY?!" yells Puffy, arms shaking as she holds Punz's axe at bay.

"YES! I LIT IT!" screams Fundy from wherever he is, invisible. "GO, GO, GO!"

In succession, multiple things happen.

Tubbo and Foolish shove Totems of Undying (the reason the plan had to be put on hold for a week) into Jack's and Phil's hands, before throwing enderpearls towards the center of the chamber.

Tommy runs towards Tubbo and Foolish, watching as Purpled distracts Punz long enough for Puffy to shove the mercenary away a good few meters.

Once everyone is huddled together, Foolish and Tommy gather Prime's power into their fingertips and create an obsidian shell to cover all of them. Just in time, as the multiple stacks of TnT Fundy planted inside the ground while invisible explode.

The obsidian cracks and shakes, threatening to throw all of them to the ground, but it holds. As soon as the shockwaves stop, they quickly mine an exit.

Phil and Jack are on the ground, groaning as the Totems slowly heal them. The Egg— the Egg is intact.

The vines around the Egg unfold, revealing Ant, Bad and Skeppy tucked under them, untouched by the explosions.

~~"NO! YOU DON'T GET TO HURT MY FRIENDS!"~~ screeches the Egg. The words sink into their minds, everyone in the chamber holds their head in pain. ~~"LEAVE!"~~

And the vines covering the chamber begin moving all at once.

Tommy runs towards Jack and Phil, encasing them in obsidian to keep them safe and uninfected.

He draws his shield, but the vines curl around it and yank it off his arm, the rough edges of the shield's handhold leaving bloody paths over his arm.

Purpled screams as a vine wraps around his ankle and yanks, throwing him to the floor.

"Fuck off!" spits out Tubbo as he cuts a trio of vines trying to throw him to the ground by his horns.

"Alright, blast these fuckers!" Puffy says, and lights some TnT.

They form back into their light-and-throw pairs, throwing explosives at the bloodvines. This close to the Egg, they regenerate at a breakneck pace, all six of them struggling to keep them back.

"I'm out of TnT!" shouts Tubbo, and Tommy curses.

"Take some of mine—" says Puffy, before she *screams*. Sticking out of her back is a dagger. Antfrost jumps back into the vines to avoid retaliation.

"Papa!" shouts Foolish, turning to run towards her.

"I'll heal her!" shouts Tommy, dropping the rest of his TnT to Tubbo (what little he has remaining) and dropping to his knees beside the downed Puffy.

He manages to get the dagger out and he has a potion of healing in his hand, before Fundy screams: "Look out!"

Tommy looks up to see Bad and Skeppy, both of their swords arcing down toward him. On instinct, Tommy goes to draw his shield from his inventory, but nothing comes. He lost it, the vines got it before, how the fuck did he forget about that he's so fucking *stupid*—

Foolish throws himself between them, the weapons digging into his golden skin and punching holes through it. Foolish's wounds are shallow because of it, thankfully, so Tommy

concentrates on pouring the potion on Puffy's wound while Tubbo, Fundy, and Purpled protect them.

Puffy's hand closes around Tommy's wrist and she tugs, making the potion splash on the ground uselessly.

"Puffy, what—?" Tommy says, when he spots the silent scream on Puffy's face, one of her eyes slowly turning red. He looks down to see red flowers beginning to bloom inside her wound.

Foolish sinks down to his knees, small vines sprouting from his shallow wounds.

"Their weapons are covered in bloodvine spores!" shouts Fundy, twisting around to avoid an arrow that comes from somewhere in the mess of vines.

Tommy looks at Puffy's grimace of pain, her other eye beginning to turn red as well. With a sob, Tommy draws his sword from his inventory and plunges it into Puffy's chest.

Foolish whimpers as one of his eyes turns from emerald to rubies.

"Sorry for this," says Tubbo, drawing his sword and plunging it through Foolish's wounds, killing him.

"I'm running out of TnT," pants out Fundy, then yelps as a vine takes a chunk of fur from his tail.

They close in together, back to back, Fundy and Tubbo creating a ring of soul-fire around them. It only gives them a temporary respite, as the vines start attacking from above.

"There's no need to keep fighting," croons Bad, petals falling from his lips. Whispers of the Egg's power accompany his words, trying to worm into their minds.

All four stand their ground. Their eyes shine as they use their divine magic to protect their minds.

"Why don't *you* stop fighting?" says Tubbo, his eyes shining toxic green.

Bad grips his head and stumbles back, releasing a scream of rage as Tubbo's power wars with the Egg's control. He knocks an arrow into his crossbow and keeps shooting.

Their gas masks start rattling, the filters close to giving out.

Tommy's hands shake, and his lungs burn. There's a stitch in his side. But still, he fights, because he wants to go listen to his discs with Tubbo on the bench. He wants to experiment more with potion-tempered weapons, and play pranks with Neethel, and go spar with Techno—

He doesn't want to die.

A vine breaks through their attempts, curling around Tubbo's neck in a noose, yanking until his feet don't touch the floor.

“NO!” Tommy screams, trying to swing his spear high enough to free him, but the vine has just enough mobility to keep Tubbo away, shaking him around like a ragdoll. “NO! PLEASE STOP!”

And it does. Along with everything else.

The sudden silence is deafening, but Tommy doesn’t let it stop him from cutting the vine around Tubbo’s neck.

The goat hybrid crumples to the floor, coughing harshly and trying to get air back into his lungs.

“Tubbo, are you okay?” Tommy says, splashing him with their last potion of regeneration. Tubbo shakily nods, before his eyes widen, looking at something behind Tommy.

“Ranboo?” Fundy says.

Tommy looks up. Standing in the middle of the chamber is Ranboo, black and white wings (when the hell did he get wings?) spread wide open. Space bends around him as if he had his own gravity, a black hole in mortal form, as he levitates. All around him, the vines move in slow motion, time flowing at the pace of honey.

Tommy spots Skeppy trying to dig into the obsidian shell keeping Jack and Phil safe and takes a sneaky potshot at him. The arrow also moves in that sluggish pace once loosed from his bow, but Tommy trusts it’ll hit its target.

“Yes and no,” Ranboo answers, turning to face them. His eyes are a changing tide of black and white over his bright purple scleras. “I am both Ranboo and the Inbetween.”

“The Inbetween?” asks Purpled warily.

“I am space and time and the primordial essence of whence the gods came from,” he explains, smiling kindly. “And I came to right a wrong my children have committed.”

Tommy gapes.

Ranboo and whatever he is possessed by nears them, neatly stepping forward to avoid Bad’s axe swing.

“It is time. Summon your god's power!” the Inbetween says, turning to stand facing the Egg. “And do so with haste. This vessel is untrained and inexperienced; he will not last much longer under my power.”

Tommy nods, breaking off from the protective circle to stand at Ranboo’s right, Fundy following. Tubbo stands at Ranboo’s left, Purpled beside him.

‘Prime, it’s now or never,’ Tommy thinks.

A surge of power floods Tommy’s body, far past anything he’s ever felt before, a presence making itself known inside his mind.

‘ *Mind if I stay here for a bit?* ’ says Prime, humor tinged in her voice.

‘ *Pay rent if you’re going to, bitch,* ’ Tommy sends back, smiling.

‘ *Of course, how does a godly form sound?* ’ she answers.

Tommy gasps. Flowers bloom in his hair, his veins turn golden, amethysts grow on his skin like the wildflowers in spring. A second, and third pairs of golden wings shimmer into existence. His eyes shine like the midday sun, like molten gold.

He looks to Tubbo, now a being of porcelain, multiple pairs of iridescent dragonfly wings sprouting from his back, the universe visible through his skin, three pairs of doll-like arms floating around him.

He looks to Fundy, now a being of decay, his skin see-through and ghostly in places, the skin around his mouth gone to reveal the rictus grin of his skull. Dark markings, like ink brush strokes, flow over his skin. Nine, dark-tipped tails flare out behind him.

He looks to Purpled, now a being of rot, eyes dotting every space of his face, crying blood that drips onto the ground. He grins, teeth sharp like an anglerfish’s. He opens his arms to reveal screaming mouths, as fanged as his own, emerging from his skin and dripping crimson.

And lastly, he looks to the Egg.

As one, all five of them release their combined strength and under their divine might, the Egg chinks, cracks and *breaks*.

Chapter End Notes

WOOOO FINAL CHAPTER POSTED!!!! I also re-uploaded all the chapters before this, replacing them with better-edited versions.

I'll post the epilogue next week.

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Behind the Gates of the Aether, deep with where the code sings, four deities, a primordial and three demigods exist.

The demigods float in place cradled by their divine power, the same power that allows them to stand in the midst of the DNA of a universe without their minds cracking under the knowledge like glass cooled too fast.

“Exdeh, you have done much wrong to this Universe,” the Inbetween says. It speaks, its voice an infinite echo of the first singularity.

The world shifts around them to underline Exdeh’s words, taking the shape of the swath of destruction left behind by the Egg, hundreds of thousands of blocks wide.

“You say that as if the creator of that parasite isn’t standing beside me,” protests Exdeh, gesturing petulantly at the Dragon Queen.

“I created him to protect my *people* from the ceaseless void *you* abandoned us to!” she growls, baring her teeth menacingly.

“And I just wanted to be born!” cheerfully says the Egg, now out of its shell.

All turn to look at it.

It is dragon-like, though more slender and stylized than its mother, and slightly less than half her size. Red, thin tendrils cover it like moss on a river rock, the white of its scales peeking through in scattered spots around its body and on its underbelly. A mane of small flowers flows from its head and down its back to bloom into a pair of petal-like wings, deceptive in their fragility, the mane continuing its path downward to end in the feather-like red tuft of its tail. A crown of white, branch-like horns flares out at the top of its head, framing its face and slitted emerald green eyes.

“Both of you are right,” concedes the Inbetween. “Yet you also hurt many in the Overworld. Such actions cannot go unpunished.”

“If I may propose something,” says Lady Death, her face flickering between a skull and her human self as the veil flowing from her wide hat sways in an invisible wind. “Exdeh forewent his duty to the End to go explore the Overworld. Why not punish him by making him unable to manifest anywhere except in the End? It is poetic justice, considering what he did to her Majesty.”

“All in favor?” says the Inbetween.

“Everyone? Really?” says Exdeh, iridescent wings fluttering in annoyance. “You too, Drista?!?”

“ Yes, ” she hisses, flickering into in her many-winged, tri-horned demigoddess form. “Maybe then you’ll learn to get off my back and *actually do your job* .”

“Now, for the Dragon Queen,” muses the Inbetween.

“I think being forced to work alongside Exdeh is enough punishment,” teases Prime, much to his annoyance.

The Dragon Queen sighs. “If that is to be my punishment, then so be it.”

“It’s my turn now?” asks the Egg, looking curiously at all of them

The Blood God hums, his many voices humming alongside him in a discordant yet beautiful melody.

“Right! The Egg could return the stolen shard of the Blood God’s power!” says Prime brightly.

“If that is to happen, my child would turn mortal,” the Dragon Queen says, flying down to curl around her son protectively.

“I’m okay with that,” the Egg says, enthusiastically climbing onto his mother’s back with clumsy, unpracticed steps. “None of you know how lonely it is to be stuck inside an egg for multiple centuries. I just wanted friends and to get out and see the world! As a mortal I still can do that, so I’m happy.”

“Though, keep enough enough power to change yourself into a human-like form whenever you wish,” the Inbetween says cryptically. “You will have use for it in the future.”

Arguing with the Deity of Time about whether or not something will be useful in the future seems like a rather silly thing to do, so the Egg simply says “Okay?”

“Speaking of mortality,” Lady Death says. “My Champion has been telling me that granting immortality to people whose mortal minds are not built to handle it was not a good idea.”

“My former and current Champion also talked to me about this,” comments Primer, her many white wings fluttering idly. “And Exdeh’s former Champion went quite insane for that reason too.”

“To change the boon we give our Champions into something other than conditional immortality, all in favor?” intones the Inbetween.

The vote is unanimous, even with Exdeh’s reluctance.

“Good,” says the Inbetween, before turning towards the three demigods present, soon to be two. “I’ll let you through the Gates of the Aether. Farewell.”

“Bye!” the Egg brightly chirps, excited with the idea of getting to see the outside world. It will *finally* have non-mind-controlled friends, and get to taste food for the first time and maybe even get a new name! And *pronouns*! Wouldn’t that be cool.

The Egg can’t wait!

Tommy carries a basket in his hands as he walks up a small hill, his fingers tracing the edges of it.

There is an apple tree in bloom on top of the hill, and beside it, a small grave rests.

He stops in front of the grave, and digs out a blanket from the basket, spreading it out on the damp grass.

He picks a bundle of flowers, zinnias, he thinks they’re called, and places them in front of the gravestone. He sits on the blanket, knees tucked under his chin.

There is silence for a few seconds, only broken by the sound of birdsong and the rustle of leaves, the morning sun shining gently on the sky.

“...Hi Wilbur,” Tommy says, tracing the engraving of his brother’s name with his eyes. “I’m sorry I didn’t come to visit you sooner. We thought we could be done with reconstruction in a month or two, boy we were fucking wrong!”

Tommy laughs, a brittle sound. “Turns out that just because the Egg is gone, doesn’t mean the bloodvines are, it just means that they can’t keep spreading. L’Manburg is still teeming with those, and we kinda planned to rebuild there but...”

Tommy fiddles with the edge of the blanket.

“A lot of bad shit happened there, y’know? Everyone kind of decided it would be best to leave L’Manburg alone,” he smiles sadly. “To give L’Manburg a peaceful third death.”

“Not that we’ve let the idea go though! We’re trying to build a place without tyranny. I mean, Techno’s idea of an anarchist commune isn’t half-bad and it’s kind of working! We just get together once a week and talk about what we need and what we hope to do and Niki brings pastries and it feels more like a party than an actual boring meeting!” Tommy says, smile brightening, hands moving with his words. “The place we chose is right beside where the Crimson Tribe is, in the Nether obviously, and I can just— hang out with everybody, it’s great!”

“I think it’s going to last,” Tommy says, the most hopeful he’s allowed to be in *years*.

“Techno says the reason nobody’s starting shit is because almost everybody has only one life and nobody wants to risk it, but I think he’s a cynical bitch.”

“No, really, think about it!” Tommy exclaims. “If that was true, everybody would spread out like before, because they’d be wary of everyone else. But we’ve all stayed together! In one place! It’s fucking amazing!”

“I wish you could see it.” Tommy’s smile dims.

“Wilbur, did I do the right thing by killing Dream?” Tommy asks, curling tighter into himself. “Fundy said that when we killed Dream, you got out of your Limbo and went to your mom, but I keep thinking that I could have had you back. That there was a way we could have convinced Dream to revive you—“

He shakes his head.

“Puffy said not to dwell on what-ifs,” he mutters under his breath. “I didn’t come here to be all moepy, so!”

“Did you know Wraith found a cure for Piglin zombification? It’s just a really fucking specific ratio of golden apple juice and weakness and some other shit, and I’ve been forging helmets with that potion so now they can come into the Overworld!”

“Speaking of forging,” Tommy says, brow furrowing. “A few days ago I saw Anala forging three rings and then Tubbo came to pick ‘em up, and I know Tubbo and Ranboo have been talking about platonic marriage for a while. So, I went and said that if Tubbo’s still not sure about which ring to give Ranboo he should choose the red one ‘cuz that one’s the most poggers, but then Anala and Tubbo started cracking the fuck up.”

“I still have no idea what the fuck *that* was about, I mean,” Tommy says, throwing his hands up in the air. “Why the fuck would he need *three* rings if he had already chosen his and Ranboo’s? I don’t get it.”

“Anyways, um,” Tommy says, before taking a deep breath and whispering to himself. “You can do this.”

He reaches for the basket, pulling out a disk. Lovingly etched in the center of it is the word ‘Chirp’.

“The disk, it... It stopped sounding like you. I played it a few days ago and I didn’t see anything. It was just music,” Tommy says, running his thumb over the vinyl, ignoring how his vision gets blurrier with every passing second. “Your ghost is gone.”

“You really are dead and not coming back,” Tommy laughs wetly, wiping a few tears off his cheeks. “It didn’t— it doesn’t feel real. Not even your funeral—“

“I can’t cry now, Ranboo and Tubbo are waiting for me on the bench,” Tommy mutters, swallowing the rest of his tears. He exhales shakily.

Gently, he places the disk in front of the gravestone, digging the edge into the soft earth so it lays propped against the stone.

He quickly folds the blanket back up, placing it back in the basket where his, Tubbo’s and Ranboo’s lunches are.

“Goodbye, Wilbur,” Tommy says.

And with those words, he turns and walks away, into the flowering spring.

Bonus Content!

- Dream got a Piglin-style trial, where he smuggly confessed to every single thing he did. The decision was unanimous, and Tommy held Dream's head still while Fundy swung the sword.
-
- Ranboo became the ambassador of the End, while also helping Karl document all of their Tales so they can reconstruct the history of their world for Eret's new museum. He usually spends weekends in the End.
-
- Tommy became a full blacksmith and has a workshop in the new city with a little apartment on top, though it's a coinflip whether he sleeps at the Crimson Tribe or in the Overworld. He adopts Shroud a few years later.
-
- Tubbo did most of the city-planning for the new city! He likes public service much more now that he doesn't have to make most of the decisions. He's also studying with Sam and Fundy on making cool technology! He did design nukes but Sam convinced him not to make them, to the relief of literally everybody.
-
- Phil didn't object to killing Dream because he realized that his haste in trying to revive Wilbur, he had been making the same mistake and neglecting Tommy. He now plans to spend the rest of his days being a better father to Tommy and Techno. It's not easy, by any stretch of the imagination and they probably will never be as close as they used to be, but it is progress.
-
- Purpled Purpled and Techno play hot potato with being the Champion of Chaos to give each other breaks from the voices. The Blood God thinks it's funny.
-
- Speaking of Techno, he completed Lethi's training, but he's found he doesn't mind being a mentor. He has two other Piglin students alongside Purpled, and occasionally, Tommy.
-
- Ever since the overworlders of the new city promised to never harm a Piglin again, and swore to defend them from any other humans that could try to attack them, the Piglin tribes have been much more friendly and welcoming, allowing them into the Tribes as guests. Multiple tribes are considering the option to follow the Crimson Tribe and settle down in one place for good, ending the forced nomadic march humanity's cruelty had begun hundreds of years ago.
-
- Wraith, now with enough resources, time and energy on their hands, revolutionized potionmaking. After finding a definitive potion cure for Piglin zombification they moved on to creating blindness (got the idea from a Warden), frost resistance (so the cold of the Overworld wouldn't be so bad), water resistance (for Ranboo and all endermen), levitation (because they could) and many, many more potions.
-

- Puffy opened a therapy office which was a pretty big success, unsurprisingly. It's placed between Ponk's clinic and George's plant shop (named Kinoko). Niki's bakery is right in front, though Puffy swears that was just a coincidence and it had nothing to do with wanting to spend more time with Niki, of course not. Quackity's bar and casino is beside Niki's bakery, and Niki has gotten into a few arguments with Quackity over the noise not letting her sleep since her apartment is the second floor of the bakery. She's considering moving in with Puffy, just so the noise won't be as loud. Puffy isn't complaining.
-
- The Benchtrio and Karlnapity end up marrying in a big double wedding. The celebration is *massive*, since they have people invited from the End and the Nether, and it ends up lasting multiple days. Drista even popped in at some point to give wedding gifts, and Tubbo cried when she gave him a pair of Elytra so he could go on flights with Ranboo and Tommy.
-
- The Egg eventually gets accepted by everyone and becomes a part of their little city. It takes time, and a lot of people were angry, but at some point it clicked that the Egg never had anyone to teach it morals and was basically a child that grew up completely isolated in a room so small it couldn't even move in it. He eventually gives himself a new name: Velvet, after a red velvet cake Niki gave him.
-
- I have no idea what to name the new city. If anyone has any ideas, please leave them in the comments!

Chapter End Notes

And that's all, folks! We have come to the end of this journey, and what a journey it has been.

I'd like to thank Cookie Monster and Malu. Both of them helped me a lot in the Discord when I got stuck in parts of this story. Thank you so much guys!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!